



THE IVORY
GRAVES

THE
IVORY GRAVES

A Novel by SIR HECTOR DUFF

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TO THE DEAR MEMORY OF
MAJOR ARUNDELL NEAVE
16TH (THE QUEEN'S) LANCERS

WHO DIED AT YPRES ON THE 21ST FEBRUARY 1915
OF WOUNDS RECEIVED THAT DAY

*"That we should be saved from our enemies and from
the hands of them that hate us."*

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THE IVORY GRAVES

CHAPTER I

THE RAVEN AND THE DOVE

THE manor of Locksbrook, once an abbey, and still so called, was transferred to lay ownership as long ago as the reign of the second Edward, when it passed, by process of forfeiture and regrant, into the hands of the Tremeneres of Wick in North Cornwall, a gentle house, but not at that time particularly affluent or distinguished. These, finding the lush acres and made gardens of the abbey much more to their taste than the rocks and bogs of their own bleak patrimony, soon relinquished the latter outright, and migrating to the newly-acquired lands took stock, and flourished there.

Even in mediæval annals there is hardly to be found, I suppose, a blacker story of greed and treachery than surrounds this expropriation of the harmless monks of Locksbrook. It bears every mark of what we should call now a put-up job of the worst kind. The royal decree which finally authorized it was wrung with difficulty from a weak king by an impudent mixture of cajolery and fraud, and the way of its execution was of a piece with the intrigues which preceded it, for, in the upshot, the unhappy victims, taken by surprise, and venturing, as it would seem, some sort of meek protest

against a spoliation which they had done nothing to deserve, were forcibly dispossessed by the lay grantee and his men-at-arms with every circumstance of brutality.

A curious legend, which obtains full credence to this day among the local peasantry, relates how the last abbot, leaving Locksbrook with his attendant clergy, met, at the main gate, a troop of soldiers, having at their head the man who had displaced him, Sir Richard Tremenere of Wick. The old priest, says this story, sought with uplifted hand to invoke divine vengeance on his despoiler, but, overpowered at that moment, as it seemed, by some mysterious afflatus, he pronounced, to the astonishment of all, the singular benediction still recorded in an ancient manuscript of those times, which has since been rendered into modern English thus :—

“ How wonderful are the ways of God ! His purposes, who shall discern them ? Behold the hand that was raised to curse thee, mine enemy, for with this hand I must bless. Ay ; blessed shalt thou and thy children be and greatly shall thy race prosper. Thy name shall become as honey in the mouths of the mighty. In vain shall the envious beset thee and the crafty seek to ensnare thy feet. Although for a little thou be cast down, yet in the end thou shalt prevail. Lo ! thou shalt pass through fire like the salamander ; the arrow of the archer shall turn aside from thy breast, nor shalt thou be whelmed in the anger of the seas. The beasts of the forest shall not rend thee, nor the pestilence consume thee. In danger is thy safety ; scatheless shalt thou go therein, thou man of blood.”

So far, then, so good. But the abbot, it seems, went on to qualify his augury by predicting that, although the chiefs of Tremenere were to flourish, they should bring misfortune and death in every generation to the men who trusted and followed them. A crooked benison

truly, which does not seem, however, to have overawed at all the person to whom it was addressed—for that Sir Richard Tremenere it was, making a boast of his impious achievement, who first assumed the armorial bearings still used by his descendants, these being a raven displayed, grasping in his talons the body of a dove, with the insolent motto "*Tenez ferme.*"

This coat and inscription, hewn more than four hundred years ago upon a stone panel above the principal entrance to Locksbrook, are there still, albeit so subdued by the attrition of centuries as to be scarcely decipherable. As to that just related story of the monkish banbenison, blessing and curse in one, I have put it from me often enough as a picturesque preposterous fable, not to be digested by any sane modern understanding. Yet it would be idle to deny that the history of the Tremeneres of Locksbrook does oddly appear to substantiate the prophecy uttered in respect of their ancestor.

Beyond question their fortunes have been maintained over a great period with extraordinary success—extraordinary because often in the face of grave and instant peril, and despite many temporary lapses, of which not a few have been such as to present, for the moment, the appearance of absolute eclipse. In nearly all the dynastic quarrels of the realm this family has been conspicuous. In the fifteenth century it followed the standard of York, and was suitably rewarded. Later on it espoused the doomed cause of the Stuarts, suffering severely for its loyalty, until the Restoration brought it into favour again, when Charles II. erected Keyworth and Withyford into baronies for the Tremenere of that day, adding thereto, soon afterwards, the earldom of Locksbrook. In 1746 the third Earl of Locksbrook was attainted and condemned to death for his share in the rebellion of the preceding year, but escaped to France, his estates becoming forfeit to the Crown. They were,

however, restored, not long afterwards, to his son, Kempion, who achieved high political distinction in the reign of George III., and who might, undoubtedly, have recovered the titular dignities of his family also, had he been ambitious of doing so.

It is very remarkable, to say the least of it, that in all these vicissitudes, no Tremenere of Locksbrook ever came to either a violent or a premature end. In this respect the history of the family is probably unique. Its chiefs have always been men of action, prone to meddle in dangerous undertakings. The majority have been soldiers. Some again have figured as statesmen, at times when the game of politics was even more hazardous than the game of war. Just think, for a moment, of the men who have headed the house at different times. Think of their warriors, from bloody Sir Richard in the fourteenth century, to Dayrell Tremenere who was shot through neck and chest in the breach of Badajoz, yet lived to command a division and lose an eye nigh thirty years after with Charley Napier at Meeanee. Think of the desperate intriguer whom Harry the Eighth cast for nine years into the Tower, Aubrey, Bishop of Preston. Remember that notorious bibber and brawler the first Lord Locksbrook, and withal his chivalrous grandson, near half of whose life was spent in exile, Wilton, third and last earl. Think of Alan, the fox-hunter, that fiend in the saddle; and of Thomas, the admiral, who would force the North-West Passage, and so persisted till he left his toes at last in the ice of Baffin Bay.

Of these, and such as these, have been the Tremeneres of Locksbrook. And yet no one of them died with his boots on, as by the law of probabilities most of them should have done. Nor in the flush of youth, nor even in the hale prime of life did they perish, but full of years, soberly, in sheeted beds. Moreover, that maledictory

part of the prophecy, touching the friends and favourites of the House, has had, to common knowledge, sinister and repeated fulfilment.

I first heard the story of the wicked knight and the unfortunate abbot when I visited Locksbrook as a small boy. I forget now who told it to me—some old servant probably—but I well remember the ecstatic sense of romance, not unmixed with fear, which it bred in my nascent fancy. Long as I have outgrown the age at which bogey tales can stir the blood, something of that childish sentiment still persists in my mind whenever I see, or even think, of that great grey house. Haddon perhaps—though of quite a different type—comes nearest to it in dignity and charm; but that famous Hall is now only a shell, vacant save for the shades of pretty Dorothy and gallant Manners, while Locksbrook is still a home of living men, and long may it be so.

The romance of an ancient building is brought closer to us, I always think, by the consciousness of its being a present habitation, and by a certain cheerful touch of modernity in its appointments and garniture. The aspect of a long tenantless mediæval dwelling may strongly move the fancy for a while, but it cannot really touch the heart. The sense of desolation is too overpowering. We cannot vividly and sincerely realize that men and women like ourselves did actually live and talk and move in those dismantled spaces. Often, too, this difficulty of association is increased by the naked display of obsolete architectural features, originally called into existence by the instant perils of feudal warfare. The living-rooms seem cramped, in our eyes, by the vast bulk of the surrounding walls. We look for windows and see only the narrow slits of embrasures. What about drainage? What about ventilation? Outside are stone courtyards, gaunt as the precincts of a prison. Beyond these again the useless moat yawns

unreal. There is, in truth, little in such vacant and decaying piles to suggest the intimate idea of a human habitation.

For myself a certain fancy of tenderness towards whatever is ancient and venerable moves me perhaps more strongly than most. I say advisedly a certain fancy, for it is nothing more. I am no reactionary, either in politics or morals. I don't really want to go back to the standards of old times in anything. They were desperately uncomfortable times when all is said, and quite as wicked as our own very likely, in their gross, heavy-handed way. The code of chivalry itself, which is the most vaunted thing they produced, was but a pedantic institution in fact, and egregiously one-sided too, addressing itself merely to a few thousand armigerous gentlemen, and punishing technical derelictions to excess, while turning a blind eye upon all sorts of real abuses. There were knights held in high honour then, I fancy, whom any self-respecting club would blackball in these days without a moment's hesitation.

Yes—but I don't like to think of that more than I can help, and there is no reason why I should. I prefer to review those old times uncritically now, gratefully even, recalling only what was fine in them, because, you see, without them, grim as they were, dust as they are, our England had not been. And that is why my pulses quicken to a house like Locksbrook; a house nearly as old as our history, yet still a home and not a ruin, linked up by a succession of lives, from remote ages to this warm present, with such steadfast continuity that it seems to partake as much of the one as of the other.

All the marks of extreme antiquity are there, but the accessories of modern comfort are there also. The monkish refectory has been preserved to its ancient uses, and makes a cool and spacious dining-room. The long gallery, once merely a means of communication between

the strongly-fortified wings, is now a storehouse of pictures and trophies. The dungeons are utilized as wine-cellar. The machicolated turret from which stones and molten lead used to be cast down on the heads of besiegers has been turned into a clock tower. Gardens have bourgeoned in all the courtyards, whose stones, worn dark and level by the tramp of men-at-arms, still pave the way between the wallflowers and the lilies.

CHAPTER II

THE WASTREL

RIGHTEOUS people were wont to point their condemnation of Nevile Tremenere and his wasted life by quoting the material advantages which had accompanied his entry into this world, and if to be born to great possessions is truly a mark of Fortune's favour, his nativity was blest indeed, for he succeeded in his cradle to estates which might wellnigh have supported a dukedom, while the death of his mother soon afterwards threw her own fortune into the balance of his already splendid inheritance.

Yet Fate, which rarely gives with both hands, had slipped, in truth, more than the usual drop of bitterness into Nevile's silver spoon. Of the two guardians under whose care he was placed, the senior and more influential happened to be a retired judge, a bachelor by condition and a martinet by habit, and the other was under his thumb. Both were excellent men of business certainly, and administered their ward's estates, throughout his long minority, with conspicuous prudence, but their attempts to manage the boy himself displayed a truly ruinous stupidity. Finding him vain and wayward, these conscientious gentlemen sought to correct his defects by a system of discipline which might have cowed any ordinary child for life. But they had fatally miscalculated the temper of the lad with whom they had to deal. Young Nevile's was a nature which would

break before it bent. He struggled with all his might against what seemed to him unjust oppression, and the increased severity with which his rebellion was visited served only to harden him before his time. His high spirits, constantly repressed, assumed a reckless and vindictive quality. His childish curiosity, always rebuffed, became sullen and introspective. Those about him had been forbidden to tell the little fellow of his future prospects, but it was impossible to hide them for very long from his restless intelligence. Little by little he discovered his real position, and when he had sufficiently meditated upon it, he went straight to his tutor, who had lately refused him some small indulgence.

"I hate you," he said to that reverend gentleman, "and I hate my guardians too, but I am not afraid of you. Some day this place will be mine to do what I like with. All the farmers will pay their rents to me, and then I shall spend the money as I choose, and you shall have none of it. And if I want more money I will cut the woods down and sell them, for they belong to me. You wanted to hide this from me, but I have found it out. I hate you, and when you are a poor old man I will never help you or give you anything."

As a matter of course he was soundly caned for this insubordination, but the punishment produced no more salutary effect than previous visitations of the same kind had done. Thenceforward indeed the little Nevile ceased to concern himself greatly about any present trouble, merely reiterating his promise that when, at last, he should come into his heritage he would indemnify himself, lavishly and without scruple, for the dull and bitter years of his boyhood.

It is not often that the resolutions of infancy are acted upon in riper years, but Nevile never forgot his childish vow, and in due course he gave signal effect to it. Nobody who was present at the dinner which celebrated

the attainment of his majority and his succession to one of the greatest estates in the West of England is likely to forget the speech in which he returned thanks to his guardians. In all that he said—and he said a great deal—there was nothing that those indignant stewards could openly resent. “Brutus is an honourable man” was his chorus, and the victims had no choice but to listen helplessly to insults so ambiguously conceived, so effectually draped that it was impossible, in that mixed assembly, to retort on them.

The thing was unpleasant, very, and in bad taste too, I daresay, but in its impish way it was extraordinarily clever. Some of the most discerning among those who heard it were wont to say, in after years, that a born master of satirical invective was lost to modern politics in Nevile Tremenere, for that speech was the first and last he ever made.

It heralded a new era at Locksbrook—an era of prodigal magnificence. During the greater part of his life its owner was never in permanent residence there, it is true. The duties of a rural landowner bored him; so did the society of his country neighbours, and he took no particular delight in field sports other than hunting, for which the neighbourhood was badly situated. Nevertheless a great establishment was always kept up at the Abbey, for neither he nor any one else knew when the whim might take him to spend a few days or weeks there. Sometimes he would repeat his visits at rapid intervals—at others nothing would be seen of him for a year or more. He might arrive by day or by night, alone, or with a few guests, or with a score—nobody could foretell. One thing alone was certain; his appearances were invariably sudden. A few hours’ notice was the most he ever gave; often there was no warning at all, yet everything must be as perfectly ordered as though the place had been his regular

abode. The entire staff of servants, from the house-steward to the scullions, stood in mortal awe of him. As a youth I enjoyed the run of the Locksbrook library when its owner was away, for despite his arbitrary temper he was good-natured enough in matters of that sort, and I had thus many opportunities of noticing how his household was conducted in his absence—yet I cannot remember ever to have seen the slightest relaxation there. No matter how long it was since his last visit; no matter even though he was reputed to be abroad, where he spent a good deal of time—it made no difference. The whole mansion, from top to bottom, was always prepared to receive him and his guests. Cut flowers were sent in every day from the hot-houses. Game hung in the larders, ready at any moment for the spit. Horses were constantly being exercised. Yet despite all this preparation, and the elaborate state of order in which everything was kept, the owner's advent never failed to throw every one into the acutest excitement. It was like a call to arms almost. One saw nothing but anxious faces on every side, and men and women went about their duties as though their lives depended on it. I am sure no oriental despot was ever served with more alacrity than Nevile Tremenere was in those days.

Needless to say he had to pay heavily for all this splendour, but the actual cost, to him, included a great deal more than legitimate expenses, for he would never trouble to ask for reckonings or investigate accounts. Not that he was credulous or stupid—far from it. He must have known that infinite waste and dishonesty went on in his household, but, so long as everything was arranged to his pleasure, his menials were well aware that they had nothing to fear, and while they trembled at his frown, they never hesitated to rob him.

His income might, however, have supported even this

improvidence if other and more exhausting demands had not been superadded. What really compromised Neville Tremenere's fortunes and shattered them at last, was his ineradicable passion for gambling. As long as he confined himself to the Turf his losses were not very serious, for he understood horses and betted with judgment; but from the moment when his evil genius persuaded him that he could make money on the Stock Exchange he was predestined to irretrievable failure. In the circumstances it could not have been otherwise. Inexperience need not ruin a speculator if he is willing to take advice, and boldness may do him no harm if it is backed by knowledge, but ignorance and self-confidence together will wreck any man in the long run, no matter what his resources or his luck may be.

As often happens, Neville's initial ventures were singularly successful, and his losses when they came, as they soon did, thick and fast, were obstinately concealed, partly for his credit's sake, partly because the man was too vain and wayward to endure that his mistakes should be the subject either of criticism or condolence. So it happened that there were very few people, up to the last, who knew or even guessed at the prodigious extent of his commitments.

He married, rather late in life, the daughter of Sir Anthony Daunt of Wratten, a truly good and charming woman, who deserved a better fate, but at least her unhappiness was not of long duration, for, having borne her husband two sons, she opportunely died, just as he was beginning to show plainly that he had grown tired of her sweet face and quiet ways.

Upon the younger of his two children Neville Tremenere concentrated all the tenderness of which his bad heart was capable. Little Dick, I think, was the only human being he ever really loved, and, in truth, his passionate devotion to the child was a thing both

strange and touching to witness. It wrought a complete change, during several years, not only in his habits, but, as it seemed at the time, in his very nature; nor can it be doubted that this reformation would have been permanent had Dick been spared. Unfortunately the little fellow's life proved a brief one, and, with it, the only influence that had restrained his father's selfish folly passed away.

Assuredly Daunt, his elder and surviving brother, never filled the same place in his father's heart—or perhaps any place. Indeed I think Neville was disposed to regard his first-born, from the beginning, with that curious hostility which men not infrequently feel for those who are to succeed them. And after Dick's death this sentiment quickened into something deeper. Thenceforward, as often as the father looked upon the face of his living son, there arose beside it the image of that other and dearly loved one who had gone. At these moments he almost hated Daunt. It is true he was not actively unjust to the lad. He treated him as his heir, and sent him in due course to Eton and into the Guards; but when they met, which was not often, Neville made no attempt to conceal his indifference. The two were in truth wholly out of sympathy, and as the boy grew to manhood their estrangement increased.

It must be admitted that Daunt was never very easy to get on with—even less so perhaps in his youth than later. His ideas, at this time, evinced a certain austerity decidedly unusual in one of his age and condition, while his temper, though slower than his father's and much better controlled, had something of the same stubbornness. Most people, I fancy, were rather puzzled how to take him—women especially. His own sex respected him, but let him alone for the most part. A few of the more effusive resented his self-contained manner and thought him conceited, which he certainly was not.

One intimate friend he had, however. George Vallance, second Viscount Brackenham, was the grandson of a Liverpool grocer who had amassed a few thousand pounds by a long life of thrift and self-denial, and the son of the man by whom that humble competence had been expanded into one of the largest industrial fortunes in England.

The first Lord Brackenham left behind him his peerage and his money—nothing else. His transcendent abilities died with him. Whence his son and successor derived the qualities which so endeared him to his fellows it is difficult to say, but for once at any rate the mundane accessory of a coronet and the greater merits of kind heart and simple faith were united in the person of this unpretending young man. A sort of plain shrewdness and downright common-sense stood him in place of higher intellectual endowments, to which he made no pretension. All men and women, in their several ways, were fond of him ; indeed, none but a churl could long have withstood the charm of that sweet and open nature. There was no more gall in Brackenham than in a spaniel. One had but to look at him to see it. Why, with his zest for life and with all the world ready to smile upon him, he should have attached himself especially to one of Daunt's proud temper and reserved habits is not very easy to understand, though these contrasts are often seen in deep and lasting friendships.

It must be admitted, however, that the mutual affection of the two was not quite of the same quality. Daunt was some years older than Brackenham, who had been his fag at school, and the relations between them at that time, combined with the difference in their characters, had given a bias to their friendship which it retained more or less ever afterwards. Daunt's was always rather the rôle of the sixth form boy—the philosopher and guide ; Brackenham's the more enthusi-

astic attitude of the admiring junior. They looked on each other with reciprocal kindness, but the one looked up while the other looked down. The younger gave and the elder accepted the tribute.

There is no doubt that in Brackenham's loyalty Daunt found a solace which was very necessary to his life at this time. According to his lights he was a dutiful son, and he felt keenly the increasing severance between himself and his father, who, latterly, had almost ceased to have any communication with him. The truth was that Nevile's affairs, after going from bad to worse for several years, were heading at last for final disaster. The reprobate was now at his wit's end. He had tried every expedient, exhausted every resource. His beautiful estate had been plundered to the uttermost. What remained of the land he could not sell, for it was settled realty, nor the pictures and plate, for they were settled chattels. Whatever was legally alienable he had disposed of long ago, and what he could not touch had been cruelly neglected. Rents had been forced up, repairs omitted, timber cut without ruth from the dark heart of the woods, that had flourished long even before the advent of his own race, and had been a sanctuary of deer under the forest laws of the Conqueror. To go further would have been to lay himself open to an equitable action, and he dreaded the exposure which must follow on the intervention of Chancery.

In this cheerless prospect one hope remained—his son must marry a rich woman. True, Nevile Tremenere could hardly expect to reap the chief benefit of such an arrangement, but still, he argued, it would be strange if he could not bully or cajole out of a suitable daughter-in-law the means of settling his more immediate difficulties.

Fate, however, ordained otherwise, and of all Nevile's disappointments this probably hit him hardest, for it

was the least expected. The lovely cause of his discomfiture was not unknown to him. She was the god-daughter and protégée of his cousin Anne Stretton, and had been a much admired figure in society for a couple of seasons. But she was an orphan, and penniless, owing everything to Mrs. Stretton's bounty.

As for Daunt, he had always supposed that he was free to please himself in the matter of a wife, nor had he doubted that suitable provision would be forthcoming whenever he should take one. He was, not unnaturally, incensed therefore, on announcing his choice, by the furious abuse with which the old man assailed it. There are things which, even from a father's lips, no one can patiently endure, and Nevile, in his wrath, was not given to the mincing of words. In the end Daunt's firm temper gave way, and the two men parted, on terms which seemed to shut out all hope of reconciliation.

CHAPTER III

NEVILE'S WAY OUT

FAMILY quarrels, always deplorable in their nature, are apt likewise to be embarrassing in their consequences, and the breach just recorded was certainly no exception to this rule, as far as Daunt Tremenere was concerned. His private means were wholly inadequate to support an expensive wife, and, to make matters worse, he had surrendered, in the extremity of his indignation, the modest allowance hitherto received from his father. Some notion he had, nevertheless, of marrying Marcia on the spot, in hopes of forcing old Nevile's hand, but Mrs. Stretton, whose influence over the girl was paramount, counselled milder measures.

"You must do nothing rash," she said to Daunt. "I daresay your plan might answer with some people, but not with your father. It is some bee he has in his bonnet. I can understand that you are hardly in a frame of mind just now to open negotiations in that quarter, but you must let me be your plenipotentiary. It is not as if I had no concern in the matter. Marcia stands in the place of a daughter to me, and your father is my cousin after all."

She wrote to Nevile accordingly, begging him to see her. But the old fox was not to be drawn.

"Dear Anne," he answered, "I am too unwell to re-

ceive you or to be worried any more about this affair. Besides, it would be useless. My resolution is taken and I shall never change it. If my son wishes to marry Miss Hessenden let him do so, but I am not going to provide for them or do anything to bring about a match of which I thoroughly disapprove."

From this uncompromising attitude he declined to budge. Mrs. Stretton, anxious in her god-daughter's behalf, curbed her just indignation with difficulty and wrote again. There was no reply.

"I have done my best for you," she said to the girl at last, "and I have failed. I know Nevile Tremenere. He is as obstinate as a whole team of mules. I can't think what it can be that has so set him against you, but he has evidently made up his mind. It would serve him right if you two were to marry in spite of him, but I am afraid he has the whip hand, Marcia, and he is the sort of man who would use it without mercy. No—if you mean to have Daunt you must wait, that is all. Of course Locksbrook is worth waiting for—but a dead man's shoes! It is rather a hateful thought. Besides, who knows how long it may be? He says he is ill now, but that is just an excuse of course. He is never ill."

In this, however, Anne Stretton happened to be mistaken. The relentless pressure of adversity, the never-ending struggle to maintain his ground and hide his troubles from the world, had broken Nevile's iron constitution at last. Already he was mortally stricken, though it was not till a year later that he learnt the deadly nature of his malady.

"How long?" he inquired of the doctors.

"Perhaps three months," was their verdict.

"Tell nobody," he said. Five months passed and he was still alive, but the time had come when those about him could no longer delay to summon his son. They said as much and the old man made no further objection.

The June sun had lately set behind the wooded combes of Keyworth, whose ridges showed with the precision of a silhouette against the luminous after-glow. In the leafy hedges, thick with the dust of a rainless summer, the pipe and the twitter of birds had ceased and stealthy shadows were moving already across the lush vale of Locksbrook when a trail of smoke, darkly staining the clear chrome of the horizon, announced to the little group of persons at Keyworth station the advent of the Plymouth express. A minute later the train swung into sight, and as it halted, Captain Tremenere stepped on to the platform.

He was a straight, soldierly-looking man, before whom the loafers fell back respectfully, touching their hats as often as his clear, sombre eyes fell upon them. His arrival produced an instant stir. Porters ran to collect his luggage. A groom gathered up his lighter belongings. The express screamed impatiently, shook itself together, and moved away.

"Ah! Mr. Daunt, sir—or Captain, I should say. We'm proper glad to see ye, sir, though 'tis a sad errand has brought ye."

It was the stationmaster who spoke, a man not yet old, but ageing, still hale and active, however, with a face manifestly designed by Nature to express a permanent joviality, though now painfully composed to an aspect as nearly solemn as its structure could compass.

"Well! Well!" he went on with the embarrassing directness of his class, "Squire be sinking fast, they say. 'Tis a merciful satisfaction you'm here, sir, for the poor gentleman mid pass away at any moment now."

Daunt said a few words in reply and, nodding to others among the bystanders, made his way to the waiting car, the eyes of all following him intently.

"It's easy seen he's the Squire's son. They be as like as egg to egg," the innkeeper observed.

"Ah! Outwardly so, 'tis true," the stationmaster agreed. "But 'twould be a calamity if 'twere the same in the matter of the inward heart. However, 'tis a time for charity and forbearance, so I'll say no more."

But others among the company seemed disinclined to conform to this reticence.

"I don't hold with uncharitableness no more than what you do, Mr. Wragg," the blacksmith remarked, "but sick or well he've been a bad squire to we. Look at the money he've wasted. It all come out of his rents, didn't it, and not a shilling have gone back into the land where it do rightly belong. Why, the state of his farms is a byword, and yet if a man complains he'll fly into one of his passions or else up and laugh at 'un."

"Ah! dear, dear!" a thin voice interposed. "'Tis very true what you do say, Mr. Grindle, but there! his punishment have overtaken him. One of the maids up to the abbey was talkin' to my missus only yesterday, confidential like, and says she, 'I do pity 'un,' she says, 'for be his sins what they may he'm suffering for 'em now,' she says. There he do lie on his mortal bed without a friend in the world as you mid say. Well! Well! Come to think of it, 'tis a sad, melancholy end for a gentleman born."

"Why as to that 'tis the same for a gentleman as 'twould be for you or me, I suppose," the blacksmith retorted. "His aristocracy makes his conduct worse, to my way o' thinking. One do look to the head of such a old celebrated family to take a interest in his ancestral tenants, but he cares nothing for 'em seemingly, nor yet for his own property. He never come to live at the Abbey at all till things got to such a pass he'd nowhere else to bide. Why, there's many here has never seen the old fox yet—not face to face as 'twere."

In truth, few of the rising generation had done so, though that did not prevent them from joining with

zest in discussion of his notorious backslidings. A wastrel at first and a tyrant at last was the substance of their verdict, from which only a few of the older people ventured partially to dissent, shaking their heads with a curious mixture of loyalty and regret, as they recalled the handsome face and open hand of his youth.

Meanwhile, the man himself, whose misdeeds these rustic moralists had taken for their theme, was drawing very near to that sanctuary, at whose threshold human reproach is silent. In one of the spacious bedrooms of his manor house, dying slowly and very painfully, lay Nevile Henry Tremenere, a great man, according to the cant phrase, inasmuch as he had been, for nearly sixty years, the head of an ancient family and the overlord of a broad estate—in all things else one to be hated, feared, or condemned, as the temper of his critics might incline them—yet now, surely by all to be pitied.

But pity was in truth a thing that Nevile Tremenere had never asked of his fellows, nor did he ask it now. Unto this last, surviving the wreck of his strength, the waste of his talents, one noble quality remained to him—courage, the cardinal virtue of men. It showed unmistakably in the resolute poise of his grey head against the pillows, in the tense interlacing of his hands upon the coverlet, in every line of his marred and tortured face. At first he had striven fiercely against the sickness that consumed him, for it was no part of his nature to submit to anything that could be beaten down or chased away. But, confronted at last with the inevitable, his vehement soul ceased to rebel, and, by a supreme effort, nerved itself simply to endure. Never had he been so nearly admirable as now, within a few hours of death, helpless, with the claw of cancer on his vitals, making no sign. Of late his senses seemed to have grown morbidly acute. Every sound, every vibration was pain, and none escaped him—not the hushed

footfall of servants in the corridors nor the lowing of cattle driven in from the home meadows ; not even the chirp of sparrows in the ivied walls or the creaking of the park elms as their full leafage stirred lazily before the summer breeze.

Above these subdued rural voices arose presently the sharper detonation of a petrol engine and the sound of wheels upon the gravelled drive. The sick man sighed and raised himself a little on his pillows. Immediately afterwards Daunt Tremenere entered the room.

As the innkeeper had said, it was easy to see that these two were of near kindred blood. Superficially their mutual resemblance was as striking as could well exist between a young man in the fullness of his strength and an old one beaten down by long disease. In both was the same broad forehead ; the same short, high nose ; the same indefinable colour of the eyes, the same clean angles of jaw and chin. Even in little tricks of gesture and expression the similarity persisted. Yet, behind that barren likeness of mask to mask, a physiognomist would have traced sharp divergence in all those subtleties whereby we judge the hearts of men. The countenance of the son was more steadfast, the curve of his lip less sullen, his eyes graver and now touched, suddenly, to overmastering compassion, for in spite of what the doctors had told him, he had not thought, somehow, to see his father reduced to such a pass as this—so changed and stricken and pitiably disabled.

The old man looked in his face and read the thought behind it.

" Yes, it is I," he said, grinning stiffly. " Hardly recognize me, eh ? Oh ! of course it's understood that you are very shocked and sorry and so forth. We'll take the duty and sentiment as read, I think. By the way, won't you have a whisky and seltzer, or tea or something ? You must make those lazy scamps of

servants look after you, Daunt. They know I can't get at them now."

He stared at the ceiling for a while, as though visualizing his thoughts.

"I suppose I ought to talk business," he continued presently, "but it's no good. I shan't go into details anyhow—there are too many of them. The long and short of it is that we are ruined, ruined, ruined. Anstiss will tell you all about it by-and-by. Goodness knows how you are going to live."

Ruin is a big word, too often lightly used. Even here it might have passed for mere careless hyperbole, but for the settled accent of despair with which it was uttered. Neville Tremenere's was a nature intensely self-willed, sanguine, unaccustomed to acknowledge defeat. Yet the tone in which he spoke now was the tone of one who hopes no longer; of one who knows that every shift has been tried, every resource exhausted—the tone of a beaten man. Daunt remarked it instantly. It was something new to him, and it carried conviction as nothing else could have done. This, that his father had said, was no peevish exaggeration, but naked truth. In a flash he knew it; realized all that it meant, and saw his prospects change and wither. Not a muscle of his face moved.

"Don't worry about these things," he answered quietly. "Even if they are as bad as that we may find a way out perhaps."

The sick man laughed.

"My own way out is clear enough," he said grimly. "But you, Daunt; you're staying on—it's you that will have to face the music. You seem pretty cool about it. Well, so much the better, only don't misunderstand me. The estate is on its last legs. I can tell you I've been hard pushed even to find money for the servants' wages this last year or two. Oh! it sounds absurd I know,

but it's true. I've been a damned bad father to you, I daresay."

He paused for a moment and went on.

"About that engagement of yours—you understand now why it was out of the question, eh? If you don't, your little Miss Hessenden will. Oh! you needn't look at me like that! What! Very well—just go and tell her what I have told you, and then ask her to marry you in spite of it. You'll see! I'll trouble you to pass me that medicine bottle."

He dropped out a dose, swallowed it, and continued.

"Pity we haven't a title for sale, isn't it? Our stupid stiff-necked forbears chose to throw away a peerage that would have been well matured by this time, and you might have done something with it. An earldom can be turned into cash in every generation, otherwise such things wouldn't be worth having nowadays. Yes, it's a pity. Still, you have what these canting snobs call good blood. That counts too, you know. There are people who will pay handsomely for the privilege of mixing their own with it. And ours is ridiculously pure. It cries for a dash of something thicker, Daunt. We've overdone it. It breeds crotchets. What folly the whole thing is."

Daunt stayed in the sickroom for half an hour longer, talking as cheerfully as he could. When he rose to go the old man put out his hand.

"I wish you well out of your troubles," he remarked. "I can't say more. I never liked you much and it's no use pretending now. I never cared for any one really, I think, except your brother Dick, and his was a short story, poor little chap. You've a heavy reckoning against me, but oddly enough I can't feel any remorse about it. I can't feel anything except this cursed pain. A very unchristian state of mind for a moribund, eh?"

Daunt looked at him for a moment, struck by the note of finality in his voice.

"Good night," he answered, taking the outstretched hand. "I shall come and see you in the morning of course."

Have you ever watched a beast of prey approaching its quarry? How sinuously it creeps, a mere shade upon the shadows, now for an instant seen, now effaced again; so gradual its motion one hardly realizes that it has any purposeful direction. Yet, once within striking distance, with what pitiless energy it launches itself.

So slowly came death to the bed of Neville Tremenere, so suddenly that night it struck him down.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. STRETTON STANDS NO NONSENSE

AS soon as possible after his father's death Daunt set himself to the unpleasant task of reviewing his financial position. Nevile's papers had been left in such extraordinary confusion that it was difficult for some time to anticipate, even roughly, the extent of his liabilities; but ever as Daunt sifted the mass of records that had been thrust so contemptuously aside, and examined the situation in the light of increasing knowledge, it grew more ominous.

It was nearly a month later that he tied and sealed the last packet, throwing down his pen with a sigh that partook equally of relief and resignation.

"That is finished at any rate," he said to himself as he lit his pipe, "and it's about as bad as it can be, apparently. I must think."

Naturally the question which exercised his mind above all others was the bearing of his altered circumstances on his matrimonial hopes, but before broaching the subject to Marcia herself, he decided to wait until some scheme should be arranged for the administration of the estate, and his own position more clearly determined.

In due course this was effected. Locksbrook must be let with the least possible delay, the family lawyer

urged, and, little as Daunt liked the suggestion, he had no choice but to accept it.

Fortunately the house was still in fine structural condition, its architecture being of that massive kind which is equally proof against man's neglect and the utmost spite of the elements. A moderate sum, judiciously expended, would put the grounds into a tolerable state of order. The shooting happened to be unusually good. To sell the great estate outright with its dilapidated farms, some empty, and the rest let at high rents to a discontented peasantry, would have been difficult, even if Daunt had wished it, but a tenant for the mansion and sporting rights Anstiss believed he could find. In that case, after deducting the interest on the debts and other charges, a net income of some nine hundred pounds a year would be available for the new squire.

Daunt betook himself to a solitary walk, the better to digest this prospect. Things might have been even worse, no doubt. There might have been nothing left at all. Still—nine hundred a year! scarcely a thirtieth part of what his father had inherited and of what he had thought to inherit in his turn. Could he ask a girl like Marcia Hessenden to share so poor a remnant of his fortunes? Well, at any rate, he would acquaint her plainly with the facts.

A letter from Mrs. Stretton came, significantly enough, a little later. She and Marcia were going down to Cornwall next week. Might they break their journey at Locksbrook? Daunt wrote a polite affirmative. It chanced that Brackenham was coming at the same time, which was just as well he thought, for in the circumstances the party *à trois* could not have failed to be embarrassing. A growing sense of disquietude possessed him as he reread the old lady's note. He felt instinctively that the change in his prospects would powerfully affect her attitude towards him as a suitor, and in this

he was not mistaken. Some gossip touching the state of his affairs had reached Mrs. Stretton's ears already, and it needed but a few adroit questions, after her arrival at Locksbrook, to satisfy her that, for once at any rate, rumour had not exaggerated the lamentable facts. Convinced on that point, her resolution was taken in a moment. The ground had shifted beneath her feet—so much the worse then—she must adjust her attitude to the new situation, that was all. She was very sorry for everybody, but being sorry would not mend matters—they were beyond mending apparently, and the only thing to be done now was to extricate Marcia from a false situation with the least possible delay.

Whether this decision was mean and cruel or merely prudent depends on how you look at it. People who admired Anne Stretton used to say that there was no nonsense about her. Such as disliked her were wont to declare that she had no heart, but that was something less than just. She had been a devoted daughter and a good wife. She was a steadfast friend. She gave bountifully to the poor out of a not very ample income, and in such things her right hand knew not what her left hand did. Like many women of her type she was inclined to take an active interest in settling the affairs of her juniors, more particularly their matrimonial futures, and, to such ends, she grudged no pains. But it must be admitted that purely sentimental considerations carried very little weight with her, when they chanced to be opposed to what she deemed more serious factors. That the mutual inclinations of any particular man and maid indicate, necessarily, the workings of a not-to-be-opposed natural law seemed to her a doctrine more applicable to savages than to civilized persons living in an age of highly complicated interests; a two-edged fallacy, striking equally at the present and the future; at our

poor selves to-day—to-morrow at the infinite life that lies beyond our matings.

All this is not to say that she was a contemner of true love ; but, according to her view, the only love that really counted, in the long run, was that which grew out of marriage, or at any rate survived it ; and how, she argued, could such survival be looked for, if the union failed in those material conditions which affect us at every turn and by which the happiness of normal men and women is touched so much more nearly than most young people will believe. As for the little prenuptial stirrings of sex instinct which are popularly dignified by the name of love affairs, and which we see going on around us every day, they were no more, in Mrs. Stretton's view, than the amiable coquettings of so many pigeons, to be encouraged or checked, according as they coincided or clashed with more important interests. She felt neither sympathy nor respect for such as regarded them otherwise—still less for those who rashly carried their own silly billings and cooings into effect, and hatched their pretty broods into misfortune.

A little since it had looked as though her god-daughter would do very well to marry Daunt Tremenere. That the girl had no fortune of her own did not occur to Mrs. Stretton at that time in the light of an objection. Marcia would bring to the marriage contract her excellent birth, her youth and health, her graceful manners and her striking physical beauty. That was to be her contribution. As for Daunt, he was then universally supposed to be a young man with an assured future. Certainly his father's improvident habits were notorious, but the family fortunes were known to be capable of supporting very large demands. Nobody suspected for a moment the extent to which old Nevile had involved them. At the worst, it was thought that Daunt might have to retrench on a mild scale for a few years, and in

these circumstances Mrs. Stretton had felt justified in giving the lovers every encouragement in her power. But now, at last, the sorry secret was out ; the pitiable tale unfolded. The ancestral nest, so amply feathered by fifteen generations, had been laid bare in one. Anne Stretton was profoundly shocked and disappointed ; quite genuinely grieved too for the parties chiefly concerned. But she felt that this marriage, which she had once so much desired, was now totally out of the question, and that no time should be lost in withdrawing from a false position.

To do Daunt Tremenere justice, she reflected, he was the last man in the world to press for the fulfilment of a pledge given in such different circumstances, if Marcia wished to be released from it. But could that be assumed ? Maidens were kittle creatures. When it came to the point nobody could tell what they would do. It was even the case sometimes that misfortune made a man more interesting in their eyes. Of course Marcia had been carefully trained, but, at a juncture like this, anything might happen. A momentary access of girlish folly on the one hand, a word of resolute counsel on the other, might decide her future irrevocably. And in any case, there was no time to lose. Drift, following the line of least resistance, soon becomes itself irresistible. If Marcia was to be extricated it must be done at once, and with a strong hand.

" You need not fence with me," she said to her god-daughter, on the morning after their arrival at Locksbrook. " I see quite plainly what is in your mind. You want to get out of it."

" Out of what ? "

" Why, out of your engagement, to be sure."

The girl flushed. It was a shade too coarsely put.

" You must think very poorly of me, if you think that," she answered indignantly.

The old lady crossed her hands in her lap and fixed her prominent blue eyes on her god-daughter.

"Very well," she rejoined, with disconcerting calmness. "In that case I'm sorry I mentioned it. We won't speak about it again."

From time to time we meet with women (occasionally, but not so often, with men) whose consciences are like those physical structures which we have inherited, in an atrophying and functionless state from our remote forbears. Thousands of years ago, for instance, the vermiform appendix fulfilled an important function in the bodies of our ancestors. The same organ persists in our own frames to this day, but in so shrunken a state that it can no longer discharge any useful duty, and only reminds us of its continued existence by interfering occasionally with the processes of digestion in a highly unpleasant manner.

Marcia's conscience, at this time of her life, was of much the same sort—too weak to be of much practical effect, yet still sufficiently alive to get in its owner's way, now and then, and make her uncomfortable. Notwithstanding her air of resentful astonishment, the suggestion that she should break with her lover did not, in fact, either shock or surprise her. In a formless inarticulate shape it had presented itself to her mind already. True she had not contemplated it, hitherto, in any deliberate, purposeful sense. She was ashamed of it; her heart recoiled from it, yet she could not wholly dismiss it. In this mood of bewilderment and trembling indecision the need of a counsellor more resolute and experienced than herself pressed heavily on her spirit. She hesitated, and put her little hand on the older woman's knee.

"I will be frank with you, godmother," she said. "The truth is that I want him and I believe I shall always want him. I don't feel as if I could ever be

happy without him. And yet, as things have turned out—if they are as bad as every one says—what are we going to live upon? I'm frightened, godmother. I don't know what to do."

Mrs. Stretton nodded encouragement. "I suppose he will say something soon, seeing how we are placed." Marcia went on plaintively, "But how am I to answer him? We can't marry while his affairs are in this state. And yet I can't give him up. We could go on waiting of course, but that seems so hopeless."

"Quite hopeless," Mrs. Stretton said. "Listen, Marcia, you have promised to be frank with me, and I am going to be equally frank with you. This is a very dangerous moment. You don't see clearly yet what is in front of you, but I see. There are rapids ahead, Marcia, and you must act decisively, or you will be drawn into them. Daunt Tremenere is not the man who would knowingly take advantage of a girl's weakness—of that I am sure. But he is curiously simple-minded in some ways. If you let him believe that you really wish to share his broken fortunes he might take you at your word. It is a matter for you to decide, and I need not tell you what your decision must be. The issue may be painful, but it is quite plain. You know the facts and you must face them."

The girl looked piteously at this inexorable mentor.

"I can't bear it," she cried. "You seem to have forgotten what I said just now—that I couldn't ever be happy without him—or perhaps you don't believe it. I tell you I can't let him go. And besides—oh! godmother, every one knows about us. I shall be talked of in a hateful way. It will be said that I backed out of it. You told me I wanted to yourself just now."

The old lady smiled grimly. "Well, what if I did?" she exclaimed. "It is perfectly true, and you are going

to do it, and it is the right thing to do. My pretty noodle, do you suppose a trifle like this is going to convulse society? In the first place, your engagement has not been announced. As far as the public is concerned there has never been any engagement. I daresay people guess that there must be some sort of understanding between you two, but mere understandings are not like formal pledges. They may be permitted to expire quietly you see, without the disagreeable necessity of proclaiming their dissolution in the *Morning Post*. I daresay we shall have a little ill-natured gossip, but what then, Marcia? Is that harder to bear than the lifelong evils of a foolish marriage? Listen to me. Daunt Tremenere is in difficulties, that you know. Well, how long do you suppose it will take him to get out of them? A few years? Are you thinking of any such possibility as that? Little fool! He will never get out. He is ruined, I tell you. Of course I am very sorry for him, the more so since it was his old scamp of a father and not himself who brought all this to pass. I respect Daunt. He is too reserved and peculiar for my taste, but I respect him, and, if his embarrassment were only temporary, I should say wait. Even if you were a plain, hardy young woman, who could make the best of poverty, I might look at things in a different way. But he is a broken man, Marcia, and you are just a soft, handsome, penniless creature. Oh! you needn't look at me like that! Cant sickens me, I tell you. My child, the luxuries of this world are no luxuries to you. They are the air you breathe. Gracious me! you can't help it. Lots of women feel just the same, without a tenth part of the beauty which makes such things your natural right and puts them within your grasp."

Marcia sighed. Every word of this uncommonly straightforward address had gone plumb to its mark.

She felt such plain speaking to be merciless, almost indecent, but there was no gainsaying its truth.

"It seems so extraordinary," she exclaimed at last, in a sort of pettish helplessness, "that things should really have come to this. Surely there must be something left for Daunt out of it all."

Large-eyed she looked round the stately room in which they sat, out of the deep windows and over the great trees of the park beyond, as though to satisfy herself that these solid appurtenances, at least, had not vanished into air.

Mrs. Stretton shrugged her shoulders with pardonable impatience.

"I'm sure I don't know how many hundred pounds a year the young man will have to live upon, if that is what you mean," she said. "Whatever it may be you are hardly so simple as to imagine that he is going to live on it here, at Locksbrook, like the Master of Ravenswood in his tower."

Marcia let her head droop. At the worst she had scarcely imagined that her lover's prospects could be compromised quite so deeply as Mrs. Stretton's words implied. The notion of poverty presented itself to this girl's mind, not as a relative but as a positive term. She was incapable of recognizing degrees in it. Either one had enough to live with and like other people of one's own class or one had not, and if one had not one just disappeared with as little fuss as possible. Whether after that one lived a little more or a little less wretchedly did not interest her. One was poor and that was the end of everything. Between poverty comparative on a few hundreds a year and poverty absolute on nothing at all, there seemed to her to be no difference worth considering. The major consequences were the same in either case—estrangement from everything that one was accustomed to; severance from one's friends and from

all who felt and thought and behaved like oneself, and banishment into some sort of spectral underworld where nothing mattered much.

That was what Daunt had come to apparently. Poor Daunt ! Still he was a man, and it was not so bad for men. They were strong-fibred creatures who could make a fight of it anyhow, and generally seemed to meet with adventures more or less exciting. Women were so different. She sighed again. How cruelly Fate had dealt with her ! A little while ago the future had seemed so fair. She would have been a good and charming wife, and ah ! was there such another house in England as Locksbrook. A hundred times she had pictured herself its châtelaine ; had planned, as brides-elect are wont to plan, how she would change this, renovate that. Was it her fault that Nevile Tremenere had behaved as he had ? Yet now it seemed that she was to be punished for the misdeeds of that wicked old man.

In the plenitude of her self-pity the figure of Daunt faded from her vision. She saw only herself standing there in the limelight—such an innocent little self, who had always meant well, never done anything wrong, yet must now meekly submit to the lash of outrageous circumstance. A burning sense of the pathos of her own position filled her breast. She turned her face aside. Her pure eyelids sank, and her delicate lip began to tremble.

Anne Stretton, who knew her own sex thoroughly, was in no way moved by this pretty exhibition of feeling. On the contrary, she welcomed it, as a watchful general, after an anxious struggle, welcomes the first flutter of the white flag on his adversaries' parapet. But though the main issue was now, in effect, decided, the old lady must needs raise a secondary point. With characteristic tenacity she would never quit a negotiation till she

had gathered up all its loose ends. Ancillary clauses were a nuisance, but they must be settled, as she well knew, or the whole work might have to be done over again.

Presently then "So far, so good," said she. "You have decided wisely, Marcia, and I mean to stand by you. But, mark you, there must be no fast and loose about this. I will eat no man's salt and deceive him, or be a party to deceiving him. Daunt must be told—at once."

Having yielded on the principal question one might have supposed that Marcia would not have troubled herself to contest this subsidiary demand, yet oddly enough—or perhaps after all naturally—she chose to make a prodigious fuss about it. She would do it by letter; well then, by word of mouth, if it must be, but some other time, not now. She was too upset; there was no need for such hurry; a dozen excuses were proffered.

But Mrs. Stretton would have none of them. There must be no shilly-shallying. Rather than that Mrs. Stretton would break the news herself. This last threat alarmed Marcia. She felt that that would never do; even smiled faintly at the thought of how the old lady would set about it. It was certainly not courage that urged the girl to reject a proxy in the interview which lay before her. She dreaded having to meet Daunt, but at the same time she was intensely anxious that her conduct should be set before him in the best possible light, and, to effect this, she knew that she must be her own advocate. From her godmother's ruthless honesty nothing, she realized, was to be looked for but the bluntest announcement of fact.

"Poor Daunt," she said at last. "When must I tell him then?"

Some time that afternoon, Mrs. Stretton thought.

"You had better not put in an appearance at lunch," she added, looking critically at the girl, whose face was, in truth, paler than usual.

Not sorry to avail herself of this respite Marcia kept her room, on plea of a headache, till nearly four o'clock. At first some wild notion came to her of feigning protracted indisposition and so clinging indefinitely to sanctuary. But sanctuary, though safe, was unbearably dull. She tried to write, tried to read—impossible; went and looked out of the window; waited a long time, it seemed, in hope of some sound or movement that might distract her ever so little. In vain! The great park lay void and still. The hush of the icy air was upon everything. A falling leaf—so slowly falling—could be heard quite a distance away. The parting of a frost-bitten twig was like a pistol shot. But these inanimate sounds only voiced the silence, as it were, and made it seem more absolute.

She left the window suddenly, and, ringing for her maid, inquired who was downstairs.

"Mrs. Stretton is in the library, miss," was the answer. "His Lordship is shooting. Captain Tremenere went out by himself about an hour ago—to the post office I believe, miss."

Marcia reflected for a little. "I am going down to the hall," she said at last. "Tell them to bring me some tea there, please. I will have it alone. Don't disturb Mrs. Stretton."

Busy as she was with her always voluminous correspondence, the returning footsteps of her host a few minutes later did not escape Anne's notice. She laid down her pen as she heard them, and summoning a servant inquired whether her god-daughter was still upstairs.

The man answered that Miss Hessenden was having tea in the hall.

“ Was that his lordship who came in just now ? ” she asked.

“ No, madam. It was Captain Tremenere.”

“ Very well,” said the old lady ; and she turned to her desk again.

CHAPTER V

CUTTING LOOSE

THE winter afternoon was closing. Shadows lay in every corner, and the sky, through the mullioned windows, showed sombre with approaching snow. A bright fire burnt in the great hall and touched with wavering light its dignified accessories—the painted escutcheons on the walls showing the raven and the dove of Tremenere, variously quartered and impaled; the antlered heads between them, and the shells of armour beneath, recessed upon their pedestals, and, in that half gloom, much suggesting the figures of the harnessed knights.

To Daunt, entering from the open, the place seemed nearly dark. Not for some moments was he aware of Marcia sitting there.

"Why, what are you doing all alone?" he exclaimed. "Headache gone I hope. Let's have some tea and lights, eh?"

"Tea—yes; I've just ordered it," she answered; "but not lights I think. It's quite cosy by the fire. Come and sit down, Daunt. Sit here beside me. I want to talk to you."

He obeyed, and they spoke for a while of indifferent things. Marcia felt woefully nervous. The task before her seemed harder than ever now that the time for its performance was at hand. She glanced at her com-

panion's face. Something in it made her feel curiously small and mean. Yet there was nothing for it. She must go on.

Presently a chance remark of his about the architecture of the house suggested a devious method of approaching her point.

"It is a dear old place truly," she said, gazing about her. "I wonder how long it has stood here."

"About six hundred years," he answered. "At least part of it is older still. The dining-room, for instance, and all that wing dates from the monks. But this hall where we are sitting was built in the fourteenth century."

"And your ancestors built it."

"Yes, Sir Richard did—the wicked Sir Richard you know."

She clasped her hands in her lap, her eyes fixed dreamily on the fire.

"Tell me, Daunt," she said presently, "who was King of England so long ago?"

"Edward the Second. Why are you asking me these things?"

"Oh! I don't know. It seems extraordinary to me, a thing that has survived so long and is so perfect still. Will it last for ever I wonder?"

"Who knows but it may," he answered, smiling a little at her earnestness. "The architects of those days wrought for all time."

"Daunt," she exclaimed suddenly, "you won't ever part with this place will you—or let it even? Promise me."

He moved uneasily.

"Dear, I was going to talk to you about that," he began, but she broke in impetuously.

"Wait! I know what you want to say, but wait a minute. We've known each other a long time, Daunt."

We've loved each other. May I speak freely to you ? ”

He turned at once so as to face her, and remained thus for a little in silence. Her eyes fell.

“ I don't know what you are going to say, Marcia,” he answered slowly. “ But if there is any one in the world who may speak freely to me it is you.”

“ Well then, is it true that you are poor now ? ”

“ Quite true.”

“ Ruined ? ”

“ Yes—practically ; people in our own class would call it ruin. If I have not told you of this before, dear, it was only because I was waiting to see my way. I intended to speak to you about it before you should leave here.”

Her heart began to beat strangely. The opportunity she had sought and dreaded was before her at last. She had her speech ready. Every word of it had been weighed ; even its gestures rehearsed. If she was going to strike she must strike now.

“ Daunt,” she began gently, her eyes on the ground, “ what I am going to say to you will be misconstrued by others, that I know. It will be said that I am selfish—cowardly. In a case like this it is always the woman who is blamed. But you, Daunt—you won't believe such things of me, will you—you who love me ? Daunt, dear, as things are we cannot marry. It is of you I am thinking, not of myself. If your position is difficult now, what would a foolish marriage make of it ? Tied to a penniless wife, what chance would you have ? I should only be a drag on you, and, knowing that, could I be happy ? Could either of us be happy ? Ah ! don't misunderstand me. It is not that I fear to share poverty with you. It is that I dread lest sharing it I should increase it and make it hopeless, and that is a risk I cannot take. I am not speaking without reflec-

tion. I've thought it all over. There are times, Daunt, when love and duty point different ways, and this is such a time. I must give you up—oh! it cuts me to the heart, dear—but I must do it, because it's the only way I can help you."

The girl's nervousness had completely disappeared. It had been, in truth, nothing more than a sort of stage fright, arising out of the consciousness that she was about to play a difficult part. Now that she had let herself go, the instinct of the born actress asserted itself. She spoke with animation, her eyes sparkled and softened, the note of sincerity in her voice was marvellously convincing.

Indeed, in that moment, Marcia achieved the supreme histrionic triumph of imposing upon her own self. She really believed what she said. It is so with all those in whom the dramatic sense is exceptionally powerful. Macready used to declare that whenever he impersonated a villain he felt villainous. Mrs. Siddons wept real tears before the footlights. So to this young girl, the rôle that she had assumed became, for the moment, a thing actual and vivid. The selfish motives which had prompted her were forgotten. A consciousness of rectitude, a glow of self-pity filled her breast; she looked her lover in the face and felt herself a martyr.

A woman capable of simulation to such an extent as this will rarely fail to impress belief upon others. Moreover, Daunt hardly needed to be convinced. He had never doubted her fidelity, but he was touched now, beyond his wont, by what appeared to him her self-denying affection. If his scruples had been on her own account he would have said no word to dispel them, but since they were for him alone they need not stand in the way.

He made haste therefore to explain that, bad as things were, they were not quite so bad, perhaps, as

Marcia supposed. Certainly they would be very poor judged by the standards of their world, yet still a long way from downright hardship. There was enough for the actual necessities of life, and for some of its simpler comforts. Anything beyond that, of course, they would have to forgo. He would leave his regiment—look about him—there were jobs to be had. They might live abroad for a time perhaps, till something turned up. It was a poor prospect for her he knew, but she had said that she did not shrink from it on her own account. If that were so then let them face it together, and count the world well lost.

This sort of argument, naturally, was the last which the girl desired to hear. Its effect was to spoil the lofty position she had taken up, and make her feel mean again, just as she had persuaded herself that she was acting nobly. A sudden descent from the clouds always ruffles plumes a little. Marcia's irritation temporarily overcame her, and she made a false step.

"Really, Daunt," she exclaimed, "I think you are rather absurd you know, talking about the necessities of life and rubbish like that. You know quite well how wretched it would all be, living in some second-rate flat probably, and never being able to see one's friends or do anything one wanted. It's all very well to say look about for a job, but where could you find one? I mean any job really worth having? You've only been in the Guards, and that's no qualification for anything else. No; it's no use, Daunt. We must face realities. It's a man's business to face them. I'm only a girl, but instead of helping me and being practical you make it harder than ever."

Her voice sounded unfamiliarly, its native tenderness for the moment quite eclipsed. Tremenere was silent. He was very far from being a fool. He saw plainly now his house of cards collapsed; understood at last that

the future he had to offer was wholly unendurable to this girl. Looking at the flowerlike face before him, the pretty, petulant mouth, the aristocratic little hands and delicate figure, he told himself that he had been unreasonable to expect anything else. To a woman such as she was, and nurtured as she had been, luxury was no surplusage, but a thing as essential as sunshine to a butterfly, dew to a lily, nectar to a humming-bird—the very breath of life, as Anne Stretton had said.

“It is not my fault,” she went on. “My feelings haven’t changed. It is circumstances that have changed. It’s not your fault either. We can’t help it. We can’t alter what has happened. The point is that the thing has become impossible.”

“Yes, you are right,” he said slowly. “It is impossible.”

“Ah! but just now you spoke quite differently. You pressed me. Yes, you did, Daunt. It wasn’t fair.”

She stopped, arrested by infallible instinct, for it was now too dark to see his face.

“Oh! Daunt—I ought not to have said that.”

There was no answer.

“I didn’t mean to vex you—indeed I didn’t. I spoke without thinking. Daunt, I beg you not to be angry with me. I’m miserable enough already.”

She waited without further speech till the sinking fire, leaping up in a sudden rally, revealed her sitting there, meek and lovely as a child in disgrace.

Tremenere rose and stood beside her.

“I am not angry, Marcia,” he said. “It is not a question of that. But you must believe me when I say that I never meant it so—to press you against your own feelings at all. I only thought—well, it doesn’t matter now. God forbid that I should seek to take advantage of you. You are absolutely free.”

So it was accomplished at last then, the much dreaded task; won after all the release it had seemed so impossible to ask for. How pleased her godmother would be! How well she had managed it! She was safe again, disembarrassed, her liberty recovered, no pledge between her and this man of broken fortunes any more. She looked up and met his eyes. There was nothing of reproach in them.

"Never mind," he said, and touched her reassuringly on the arm.

In that very moment, when everything was over, when she had gained her point, and had nothing to do but rise and go, her self-control deserted her. She turned from him with brimming eyes.

"Ah! Marcia," he said, for her distress was palpable.

She hesitated, turned to him again; then after the perverse, the illogical, the wholly incomprehensible manner of women, suddenly, unreservedly, with both hands, threw all the fruits of her victory away.

"Oh! what a little beast I am!" she cried passionately. "It is a lie what I said about giving you up for your own sake. I have thought of myself. I've been afraid for myself. Meanly afraid of not having the things that other women have. Afraid of my godmother—you don't know what she is, what I've had to go through. But I won't be a snob and a coward any more. I will marry you, Daunt. I will, indeed—only, nobody must know till it is over. You must arrange it. I could meet you at a registry office—anywhere—I don't care. As soon as ever you like."

She clung to him in an abandonment typically childish, all her body trembling against his own. He disengaged her arms, gently, not without difficulty, rather nonplussed for the moment by this fresh complication.

"Marcia, don't, dear, don't reproach yourself," he urged. "Listen, Marcia. You were right in what you

said at first ; it cannot be. I was mad to let myself think otherwise, even for an instant."

He felt her embrace tighten about him ; heard her voice, muffled in his coat, murmur an inarticulate dissent.

" Poor child," he thought, " trying to deceive herself." But he was not himself to be deceived again. Patiently he essayed to convince her back to what, a little since, she had so energetically maintained—the impossibility of it, the folly and hopelessness, using her own former arguments to cope with her present infatuation, reinforcing them as strongly as he could, purposely stressing the darkness of his prospects, the sacrifices any woman must make who should elect to share them.

The girl lifted her head from his breast and looked at him fixedly.

" You don't think I'm capable of it then ? " she asked. " Not brave enough ? For the man I love."

He paused, seeking his words with care.

" Marcia, it is like this," he said at last, earnestly. " If there was no doubt in your mind, no afterthought ; if there had never been any or the shadow of any, then it would be well perhaps to let you take this risk—it might be for your happiness after all. But you see that is not so. I'm bound to remember what you said a few minutes since. You were speaking out of reflection then, and you said you could not do it. Now you are speaking out of emotion, and you urge me to let you do it. I can't, dear. I should be a poor sort of rascal, don't you think, if I allowed you to commit yourself on an impulse like this ; for it is just an impulse, Marcia. It will pass, and you will see things again as you saw them before."

Even as he spoke her clouding emotion receded. He was right, and she knew it ; felt already, with a sense of relief for which she hated herself, her errant feet thus stayed upon the brink of Rubicon.

"Very well," she said at last, wearily. "I suppose you know best—you and my godmother."

"Your godmother?"

"Yes; she spoke to me this morning, very much as you have spoken now. She thinks as you do, that I'm not fit to be a poor man's wife. Just a soft, handsome, penniless creature she called me—and it's true. I couldn't stick it, Daunt. Poverty! I don't know what made me so silly just now; I'm glad you stopped me."

He said nothing; there seemed nothing more to say. In the silence that followed, the purr of settling ashes on the hearth, the footsteps of servants in distant corridors, all the trivial household noises that customarily pass unnoticed, assumed a strange distinctness. It was a relief to both of them when the hall door swung open, admitting a blast of wind, and Brackenham stamped cheerfully into the house.

"Fifty-two bunnies, eighteen snipe, and a woodcock," he announced. "Alone I did it, and well enough too for a January afternoon."

He set his back against the fire as he spoke, spreading out the flaps of his frieze jacket, from which the damp vapour rose about him like a nimbus.

"I suppose you want some tea," Marcia said, lifting the teapot and looking inside. "I expect it's rather cold. It's your own fault for coming in so late. You'd better ring for a fresh brew I think."

"No, never mind; I'll take what there is. By Jove, I'm famished."

He cut a slice of cake as he spoke and made as if to sit down beside her.

"How dare you come near me when you're all wet and muddy like that," she exclaimed laughing, making room for him nevertheless. "Why, your coat is positively oozing. And how red your ears are."

"I can't help it," he rejoined, rubbing the criticized

members briskly. "It's freezing stiff outside, you know."

Marcia's cheeks dimpled as she handed him his tea. She and Brackenham had known each other for some time after the pleasant, casual fashion of people who move in the same society, and whose meetings are frequent and brief. His intervention at this juncture, dispelling as it did the acutely emotional atmosphere of the last half-hour, was welcome enough to her. She could always rely on Brackenham to play up to her changing moods, and he responded to her banter now with his usual good humour. But later, when Daunt had left them, her sudden animation as suddenly subsided. Looking at her, as she sat with her cheek resting in the hollow of her hand, Brackenham noticed for the first time that her face was paler than usual.

"Cheer up," he said at last, puzzled by her continued silence. "What's wrong?"

She shrugged her shoulders, petulantly.

"Oh! I don't know. I suppose I'm tired or something. It doesn't matter. I wish you'd leave me alone."

The slight unsteadiness in her voice did not escape him, and though far from guessing what was toward or suspecting it to be of serious moment, his kindly nature was moved to instant concern.

"Why, Marcia! I'm awfully sorry," he said, with awkward sympathy. "I'd no idea—look here now, suppose you put your feet up on the sofa and let me get you some more cushions and make you comfy, what? It's this beastly weather, I expect. Haven't caught a chill, have you?"

She glanced at him over her shoulder, smiling faintly at his anxious countenance.

"What a fuss-pot you are!" she exclaimed. "I'm all right. Why are you putting on that extraordinary wooden face?"

"Well, because I can see you aren't yourself, that's all," he replied. "Or else something is troubling you."

She sat up at that, her cheeks flushing. "Oh! you see that, do you?" she exclaimed scornfully. "How clever you are, Brack. There's no keeping anything from you apparently. Can you guess what it is? No, I haven't broken the best decanters. You must think of something else. I say, what nonsense we're talking."

She went up to him as he stood with a cushion under each arm, and put her hand on his sleeve.

"Never mind; you're a good old thing, Brack, only you don't understand women a bit, do you? I'm perfectly all right, and nothing is troubling me except a headache. See? Good-bye now; I must go up and dress."

"Dress! Why, it's only half-past six," he protested. "We don't dine till eight."

But Marcia had retreated. "Half-past six—that gives me an hour," she reflected. "I can get it over by then."

She made her preparations for what she was about to do with curious deliberation. To the masculine mind it would seem hardly credible that the expression of genuine emotion can be induced voluntarily, at a given moment. Yet women have this strange power, and, in the exercise of it, find a solace denied to men.

Marcia undressed without any particular haste, donned a loose gown, turned down the lights, and stretching herself on the bed, with her face against the pillows, broke suddenly into a passion of tears.

CHAPTER VI

LADY WAVENEY SUMS IT UP

MRS. STRETTON plumed herself, among other things, on her insularity. It was a boast in her mouth that, with the exception of a single visit to Switzerland in her girlhood, she had never been outside these islands. Foreigners, in the mass, struck her merely as incomprehensible, and slightly absurd, but if there was any foreign people whom she actively disliked it was the Germans. She considered them over-prone to meddle in their neighbour's affairs, insufferably cocksure in their mental outlook, and highly unscrupulous in their methods, and she was wont to say that what really surprised her was that the world should be content nowadays to put up with that sort of thing. Trouble, she opined, would come of it yet, in which conjecture she showed a good deal of prescience, for that was many years before 1914, and it was the fashion then to pooh-pooh such doctrines as "unthinkable."

Had any one suggested to the old lady that her own cast of mind presented certain features essentially Prussian, indeed Bismarckian, she would have been most indignantly astonished. Yet, as well in her way of looking at life as in her way of dealing with it, Anne, truth to tell, was an Iron Chancellor in petticoats. What counted with her was always the ultimate end. Minor considerations, among which, I am afraid, she

included everything that other people might think or feel, caused her very scant concern. Opposition, if passive, she was accustomed to ignore; if active, to overbear, and that in the most direct and uncompromising fashion. It always seemed to her simpler, and, somehow, more straightforward, to cut through a knot forthrightly than to waste time by picking and fumbling about its strands at the risk of enravelling it into hopeless complications. That, in effect, was *Machtpolitik*. Mrs. Stretton did not know that it was—had never heard the word very likely. Yet all her life she had practised what it stood for, much as, in another age and country, a certain Monsieur Jourdain practised the art of writing prose.

And she had found it, on the whole, a very successful policy. As generally happens with such dynamic characters, people had formed the habit of giving way to her. "You know what Anne is" they would say—meaning that, if you attached any value to a peaceful existence, you had better not cross such a forceful creature.

Yet that night she went to bed in a mood decidedly less complacent than the results of her diplomacy in the matter of her god-daughter's future would have seemed to justify. Marcia had come down to dinner looking much as usual, and had behaved with irreproachable poise throughout that somewhat dismal meal. But on going later to the girl's bedroom, Mrs. Stretton had been taken considerably aback. She had expected a scene, and would have known quite well how to deal with it—would indeed have welcomed it in the circumstances as a natural and healthy ebullition. But there had been no scene. On the contrary, Marcia had exhibited an emotional restraint altogether unusual in her.

"You have trained me well, haven't you, god-mother?" she had said. "Whom do you want me

to marry now? I don't care in the least who it is. You will find me perfectly tractable on that score I assure you."

The girl's voice had been singularly calm, but its level bitterness, the inscrutable smile on her lips, the tearless misery in her great eyes, had impressed Mrs. Stretton, as no protestations, no sulks or upbraidings could have done. Over and over again, as she lay awake that night, Anne told herself that she had done the right thing in the right way; yet, for once, her confident spirit wavered a little. Never had Marcia looked like that before; never behaved like that. She had always been a creature of petulant and transitory emotions, easily distressed, easily comforted—a child. And now, within the space of a few hours, she had changed, it seemed, into a woman. There was something formidable in her look. That affair must have gone deeper than Anne had supposed. She turned restlessly on her pillow. What a nuisance girls were! Well, she had acted for the best, and it would turn out for the best—no use admitting any doubts on that score now. Marcia would get over it. She would have to get over it, and the sooner she could be married off to a suitable husband the better. It was more urgent now than ever. Even the girl herself seemed to realize that. She must not be allowed though, to spoil her beauty and sour her spirits by moping. "Shake her up!" thought Anne. "Distract her!"

Unfortunately the programme immediately before them was not much calculated to have that effect. They were due next day in Cornwall, on a visit to Mrs. Stretton's sister Sophy, who was the wife of an ecclesiastical dignitary, and lived in the precincts of the cathedral city of Pensarn. Sophy was a dear, but, like most dears, rather dull—in fact, a mild, clinging, ineffectual creature. She had chosen to espouse her Marmaduke

when he was an obscure curate with a ridiculous income and no prospects, and it was entirely due to the subsequent exertions of the strong-minded Anne and some of her influential friends that he had been hoisted at last into the comfortable archdeaconry which he now occupied.

Under the circumstances it was a pity, Mrs. Stretton felt, that her god-daughter happened to be bound for Pensarn at that particular moment. It would not be amusing for the girl, and, besides, Sophy would be sure to sympathize and talk nonsense to her, for Sophy was incorrigibly romantic, holding and avowing the most impossible views on life and love.

No—the more Anne thought about it, the more she inclined to the conclusion that it would not do. For herself she could hardly get out of this visit. It would be ungracious to upset the archidiaconal arrangements at such desperately short notice. Nor in truth did she wish to get out of it. She was feeling a little tired and, though Pensarn might be slow, it was eminently restful. Besides, she had not seen Sophy and the children for some time, and she was fond of them. But there was no reason why Marcia, in her present mood, should spend a whole fortnight down there, with nothing to do but play croquet and attend the cathedral services. There were plenty of people with more lively households who would be glad enough to have her. The Waveneys, for instance, at Wrenborne. Mrs. Stretton knew that there was a party of some sort at Wrenborne just then, because Brackenham had mentioned that he was going on there from Locksbrook. That would be far better for Marcia than mooning about at Pensarn. She and Edith Waveney had always been good friends, and a girl, more or less, could make no difference in a house like that. Mrs. Stretton entirely approved of Lady Waveney, a sensible, cheerful young woman, who had married early and brilliantly, and, as it chanced, very

happily too. At such a juncture Marcia could not be in better hands.

Resisting a growing drowsiness the old lady sat up and switched on the electric light at her elbow. Better write to Edith now. It would be necessary to explain things a little and there would not be much time in the morning, for they were leaving by an early train. Her correspondence pad lay on the small marqueterie table by her bedside. She pulled it on to her knee, wrote straight to the point, as her custom was, and, having thus discharged her anxious mind, drew the bedclothes about her ears, with the air of one shutting out this world and its troubles, and so fell asleep.

Like a good many other people Lady Waveney had heard vaguely of the recent changes in Daunt Tremener's prospects, but Mrs. Stretton's letter brought authoritative confirmation of these ambient rumours for the first time.

"Oh, Ted! listen to this," she exclaimed to her husband next morning. She held the open note in her hand, and was balancing herself on the arm of an easy-chair, wherein a mild-looking man was trying to lace up his shooting boots, an operation with which his wife's left shoulder and elbow considerably interfered.

"Well?" he said presently, looking up at her.

"I rather expected something of the kind directly I saw old Anne's handwriting and the Locksbrook postmark," she observed, shaking her head. "But I had no idea it was as bad as this."

She continued to read to herself with periodic ejaculations.

"I thought you asked me to listen to something," Waveney said at last.

She rumbled his hair absent-mindedly with her disengaged hand.

"Yes, I know. I'm just finishing the letter. How impatient you are, Ted! It's from Anne Stretton and, oh Ted, she says Daunt is quite ruined, and he and Marcia can't possibly afford to marry now, and it's all off, and she wants me to ask Marcia down here for a change. Fancy!"

"Let me have a look, will you?" Waveney said, rather staggered by this breathless recital. He took the letter from his wife's hand as he spoke, and read it slowly, his face lengthening.

"What wretched luck," he remarked at last. "It seems a pretty comprehensive sort of smash according to Mrs. Stretton. I'm sorry. Good chap, Tremener. In my old regiment too."

"So he is," Edith said. "But he won't be able to stay with them now, Ted, will he?"

"I don't know. I shouldn't think so. What about Miss Hessenden, eh? Better ask her at once, hadn't we?"

"Oh, of course. I'll telegraph. We must try and cheer her up, poor girl."

"Do our best," said Waveney. "Only thing is I hope Mrs. Stretton doesn't imagine that we've got a large and brilliant party here. There's only Brackenham and Madame de Chateauvert, and then the two Streatfields coming this evening, and John Branksome tomorrow. No use asking more men so late in the season. It's the fourth time through the coverts, you see, and we shall only be shooting cocks most of the time."

"Oh! that will be all right," Edith said. "Anyhow, Marcia can't be more bored here than she would be at Pensarn with that old Canon—or Dean is it?"

"Archdeacon," Waveney corrected.

"Archdeacon then. I'm rather glad she's coming, Ted. She's very attractive, don't you think?"

"Yes, I suppose so. At any rate she's uncommonly good-looking."

"Which is all that nine in ten of you care about! But Marcia can be quite amusing too when she likes."

Waveney looked thoughtful. "We can hardly expect her to be particularly amusing just now though, can we?" he suggested.

"Why not?" his wife retorted, laughing. "You don't suppose she means to go about with a long face in public, do you? A man would, of course, but we poor women aren't allowed to show our feelings like that. We have to wear a cheerful countenance whate'er betide, and let concealment like a worm in the bud——"

"Prey on your damask cheek," interrupted Waveney hastily. It was one of the few quotations he knew and he was not going to be done out of it.

The door of the library opened and Brackenham walked in.

"Have I interrupted a conjugal tiff?" he asked. "It isn't my fault. You ought to have locked the door, you know."

Lady Waveney slipped off the arm of the easy-chair.

"What do you mean?" she inquired with dignity.

"Well, I thought I overheard your husband admonishing you for impertinence in rather unmeasured terms. It's a grave fault in a wife, but I must say I was astonished at your language, Ted."

"Damask cheek I said," Lord Waveney explained. "It's out of Shakespeare. What an old ass you are, Brack!" he added, grinning as he caught the other's eye.

"How can you be so silly," Edith exclaimed. "I had an interesting piece of news for you, but I shan't tell you now." And she walked off, laughing at him over her shoulder.

Brackenham looked at his host interrogatively.

"Oh, it's only that a young friend of yours is coming down here," Waveney said. "Miss Hessenden;" and he resumed his bootlacing.

Marcia arrived the following afternoon, wearing, as Lady Waveney had predicted, a perfectly cheerful countenance. Nor was this animation altogether forced. She felt infinitely glad to have escaped from the sadness of Locksbrook, the tedium of Pensarn, and to find herself, for a while, among people to whom the complications of her private future were not a matter of direct personal concern.

Tea was going on in the rather small, brightly-lit hall at Wrenborne as she entered it—a fresh, graceful figure, in her simply-cut tweeds and dark furs. The frosty drive from the station had heightened the delicate colour in her cheeks, and her eyes were shining.

“Marcia, dear, you must be perishing,” Edith Waveney said, kissing her. “It’s the coldest day we’ve had for ages. Come along to the fire. You know everybody here I think, except Madame de Chateauvert.”

The Frenchwoman smiled, moving a couple of cushions to make room for the girl beside her.

“Oh, thank you,” Marcia said, settling herself comfortably. “How cosy this is! Brack, give me something to eat will you? One of these angelica things. I *am* glad to be here, Edith. Such a relief after Pensarn.”

“Pensarn!” Brackenham exclaimed, laughing. “Why, you can’t have been there more than twenty-four hours.”

“I know, but I might have been there for weeks if Edith hadn’t rescued me.”

The talk became general, inclining to topics of local interest, as often happens in English country houses. Agnes de Chateauvert alone, as a comparative stranger (for she lived chiefly abroad), found this intimate conversation a little beyond her, and had, in fact, begun to read one of the just arrived evening papers when her hostess, noticing her abstraction, inquired whether there was any news.

"Why, yes," she answered, looking up. "There is some news which happens to interest me rather. Locksbrook Abbey is to be let. I can't help feeling a certain concern about it, because I chanced to meet Captain Tremenere once and I had liked him so much. It seems he is in difficulties now and can't afford to live in his own home—at least, if one is to believe what this paragraph says. I am very sorry. He struck me as rather a remarkable man—and so emphatically *grand seigneur*. You know him perhaps?"

Every one had stopped talking. Marcia picked up a blue Persian kitten which was capering near her, and pulling it on to her lap began to fondle it effusively. Edith glanced at her for an instant.

"Yes, I think we all know him," she said. "By the way, Marcia, if you or Mrs. Stretton would like one of those little animals there's a whole brood of them going begging. Champion bred on both sides."

"Going begging are you, kitty?" the girl exclaimed, cuddling the fluffy creature against her neck and breast. "Oh! you're rather sweet, aren't you? Yes, Edith, I should love to have one. I think I'll go to my room now and see about unpacking, if you don't mind. I've got such a fool of a maid, I daren't let her touch my things unless I'm there myself."

Madame de Chateauvert's eyes followed the girl curiously as she left the room.

"Tell me," she asked her hostess as soon as they were alone: "Did I by chance say anything stupid just now?"

Lady Waveney laughed.

"Oh no; at least—it doesn't really matter—but the subject of Daunt Tremenere is by way of being taboo just now when Marcia is about. You see, there was a certain *tendresse* in that quarter."

Madame de Chateauvert looked genuinely distressed.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea of that!"

I'm so little in England now. *C'est une bêtise que j'ai dit là.*"

"Not a bit, Agnes," Lady Waveney rejoined. "I ought to have warned you perhaps, but as a matter of fact I know very little about it. Marcia is a curious girl. She has never confided in me though we've known each other ever since we've been children. There was no formal engagement. Daunt's father objected I believe, but they were young enough to wait. However, now that the old man is dead, it appears that he has left nothing but a mass of debts behind him. And every one believed that Daunt would come into thirty thousand a year. He thought so himself of course. Too bad, isn't it?"

"Then he and Miss Hessenden cannot marry after all?" the Frenchwoman asked.

"Oh, well, I don't know of course what Daunt will have to live upon. An estate like that can't be wrecked without leaving some flotsam and jetsam behind. I should have thought that they might have married—at a pinch. But apparently Mrs. Stretton is determined that there shall not be any pinch."

"Mrs. Stretton?"

"Yes. Marcia's adoptive mother, you know. She has made her break with Daunt definitely, now that he has lost all his prospects. It sounds a shame, doesn't it, and personally I think it is, though Anne Stretton means well. Marcia was dreadfully upset of course—in fact, Mrs. Stretton asked me to invite her down here for a change."

"I see," said the other slowly. "Still, if these young people are fond of each other—have they nothing to say in the matter? I should not have thought, somehow, that Captain Tremenere would let any third party decide a question like that. He seemed to me a wilful sort of man."

"Yes, of course; but then, you see, he's awfully proud, Agnes, and, now that he is ruined, he can't very well hold Marcia to a sort of informal engagement like that against her will, can he?"

"Not if it is really against her will. But apparently it is only against Mrs. Stretton's will."

"Ah! it comes to the same thing. Anne Stretton has that girl completely under her thumb. I've no patience with Marcia there. She's really fond of Daunt, and if she wants him she ought to stick out for him. But I'm sorry for her too. If she ever gets away from the thralldom of her godmother she'll develop into a very different sort of woman, you'll see. Better perhaps, worse perhaps, I don't know, but not the self-centred little thing she has been. That's not the real Marcia. There's much more in her than people think. After all, she's only a young girl."

Madame de Chateaufvert laughed outright.

"Edith! What airs! Come! You and she must be nearly of an age, aren't you?"

Lady Waveney blushed.

"Marcia is twenty-two. I'm only twenty-four certainly, but then, you see, I've been a staid married woman for three years and a mother for nearly two. So I'm ages older than she is really."

She paused and put her hand on the other's knee.

"Agnes, shall I tell you what I think? I think Mrs. Stretton will marry that girl to Brackenham now."

"Goodness!" the Frenchwoman exclaimed, arching her brows. "She is then an all-dispensing Providence, this old lady! And I thought it was my country that was the home of arranged marriages."

"Well, you see," Lady Waveney resumed thoughtfully, "Marcia must marry some one, mustn't she? And poor Daunt is out of the running now. She and Brackenham have always been excellent friends. There

doesn't seem any obvious reason why they shouldn't live more or less happily with each other, does there? After all, how many of us wed our first loves? And yet—oh! Agnes, I don't feel easy in my mind about it at all. Brack is an awfully good sort of course, but I'm afraid he isn't Marcia's sort. She's such a kittle creature. Mrs. Stretton dominates her, and so she thinks she understands her, but she doesn't. Well, it isn't my business, and I don't mean to take a hand in it either way—except to watch and pray. Now, Agnes, we must fly. Look! it's nearly eight and I do detest being hustled into my clothes, don't you?"

CHAPTER VII

SECONDED

THOSE Englishmen whom circumstances impel to leave their country may at any rate count themselves fortunate in that they belong to a nation whose dominions offer so wide a field, whether for settlement or adventure.

Does a hale, cold climate please you? There is Canada under one pole and the Falklands under the other. Are you for the fierce bright tropics? Northern Australia, equatorial Africa, the countless islands of Polynesia are all before you, where to choose. Do these extremes affright you? Are temperate conditions your quest? You shall enjoy them in New Zealand, in Tasmania, in the Cape Colony. The lover of cities, the lover of solitudes, the woodsman, the dalesman, the farmer, the hunter, the mountaineer, each shall find somewhere in this wondrous empire of ours his appropriate environment.

Daunt Tremener sat with his head in his hands, looking at the map of the world—at the medley of colours that mark its settled and partitioned surface, and at the blank spaces that stand for lonely, still unconquered regions, now so far and few.

Truly, it is a curious and instructive thing to watch how this patchwork grows and changes from one decade

to another, how the warm, positive hues of civilization encroach always more and more deeply upon the wilderness, spreading over thousands of square miles that are mere inches on the tinted paper—and yet, for every inch, what perils braved, what trials borne, what cost, England, of treasure and toil and ardent life!

Daunt's eyes, moving slowly, as though on some unfamiliar quest, settled at length upon the map of Africa, between the Indian Ocean and the fountains of the Congo, where Belgian green and Portuguese yellow are split apart by a belt of red denoting a British Protectorate. Having studied the atlas attentively for a few minutes he pushed it aside and lit a cigarette.

"A native battalion," he said to himself thoughtfully. "I wonder what it will be like. It seems I must join as a subaltern. Well, that matters very little, after all, and in other respects it is the sort of thing I am looking for."

He smoked reflectively for a while; then taking a sheet of note-paper wrote a few words, stamped the letter, and put it into the post-bag. A fortnight later his name appeared in the *Gazette* as seconded for service under the Colonial Office.

Nearly a year had now passed since his father's death. The estate had been wound up. A tenant had appeared for Locksbrook. There was nothing to keep its owner in England any longer. On the day before his departure he paid a farewell visit to Brackenham. It was then mid-April. In the park at Bracy, as he drove through it, daffodils were blowing by myriads together, making whole acres radiant. Above the brodered earth shone a clement sky, all trailing white and tranquil blue, and in the budding thickets the hidden thrushes sang with passionate sweetness. In fact, it was one of those days when our usually sober countryside condescends to a rare mood of coquetry and puts forth its utmost charm.

Even Daunt, preoccupied as he was, felt vaguely the force of these sylvan attractions. Perhaps Brackenham felt it too as they talked that evening.

"You've never told me why you are going, Daunt," he said. "I know—" he hesitated—"I can't help knowing that you're poorer than you ought to be, old chap. But you could manage somehow, surely. You needn't really leave us. Isn't England good enough for you?"

Daunt was standing at the window looking out into the twilight.

"No," he answered, without turning round. "To be candid, Brack, it isn't good enough now."

Neither reverted to the subject again. They began to speak of Africa, of exploration, of hunting and war, and all the adventurous chances of foreign service. Brackenham's face lit up with interest.

"After all," he said presently, "it's a man's life that; a wider life than ours here at home. I could almost find it in me to envy you. I wish you were not going, but perhaps you are right to go."

Daunt faced round from the window.

"Well, why not come too, Brack?" he said suddenly.

The other stared at him.

"Just for a few months I mean," Daunt went on. "You could be back here for the shooting, and you wouldn't take the loss of a London season to heart I imagine."

Brackenham hesitated and looked a little confused.

"Hang the London season," he broke out at last. "And hang the shooting too. It isn't that. I would come with you fast enough if it wasn't for something else—something more serious. It concerns us both. I was going to speak to you about it, anyhow, only it's rather hard to begin. You see I'm bound to start with a question which may strike you as impertinent."

His companion looked at him in silence, somewhat mystified by this preamble. Brackenham raised his honest eyes.

"Daunt," he said, "is there anything between you and Marcia Hessenden?"

He flushed as he said it. Tremenere walked slowly up to him.

"That is a singular question," he observed coldly. "By what right do you put it to me? Or let us say for what reason? I don't understand how it concerns you."

"It concerns me as nearly as anything can concern a man," Brackenham said. "It concerns me because I want her to be my wife, and I can't speak to her till I know how things are between her and you. There was a time when I thought—everybody thought—that you two were attached to each other. But, now it's different, Daunt. You're going away for a long time, and I don't know what to think."

The recipient of this candid avowal stood amazed. That Marcia should marry sooner or later was certainly no more than natural; almost indeed inevitable. So much he had always realized. But that she should marry Brackenham was another thing. Such a possibility had never entered his mind, and now, for the first time, crudely formulated, it struck him with sudden dismay—even with a sort of repugnance. That he must resign Marcia was undeniable; he had resigned her already. But to be supplanted by Brackenham, of all men, his junior, his disciple, his quondam fag, his foster brother, that touched his jealous temper to the quick. Almost he could have yielded with better grace to a less worthy rival.

"Tell me," he said at last, rather to gain time than with any more definite purpose, "how long has it been so with you?"

"Only for a few months," Brackenham answered. "Of course we've been friends for years, as you know."

"I see. And now it has got beyond that, eh?"

The irony in his voice stung poor Brackenham a little.

"I don't know that it has got far beyond it," he said, "but somehow I've seen more of her lately and I've grown very fond of her—I can't help it, Daunt. I'll play the game though. If there is any understanding between you; if you're waiting for better times, old man, or anything of that sort, you've only to say so. But if you're not in it, I might have a chance."

Tremenere shrugged his shoulders. "I don't see why you shouldn't take whatever chance you may have, irrespective of any one else's," he said. "However, as it happens, you can make your mind quite easy about me. Of course Marcia and I have known each other for a long time, and I admire her immensely, as every one does. But there is nothing between us in the nature of an engagement, Brack, if that is what you mean—and there never will be."

He smiled as he said it. A watchful man might have seen through his elaborate indifference; a suspicious one might have felt something less than satisfied with the limited nature of the assurance given. But to Brackenham it was sufficient to dispel every shadow of doubt. His eager mind leapt at once to the welcome conclusion that this man and maiden, both so dear to him, were no more to each other than he would have wished them to be. At the thought his face grew suddenly radiant.

"Congratulate me, Daunt," he urged. "I daresay it sounds a conceited thing to say, but somehow I feel that everything will go right now."

Daunt hesitated for a moment. The word "congratulation" stuck in his throat.

"I hope you will be happy, both of you," he said, not without emotion. "I do honestly hope that, Brack, from the bottom of my heart. No, I'm not going to sit up and talk any longer. I have to catch the early train to Southampton, you know."

CHAPTER VIII

CHENJOVU THE ELEPHANT

IN the northern half of the British Protectorate already mentioned one of the immense lakes of equatorial Africa unfolds, for nearly four hundred miles, its glorious blue—a place of alternate calms and sudden tempests, so deep that its uttermost abysses have never been plumbed, rock-bound, sand-bound, full of beauty and mystery; a veritable sea in everything save the sweetness of its brimming waters.

On the western shore of this lake stands a small fort, a few brick tenements, surrounded by a six-foot bastioned wall of stone. Outside this enceinte again are regular lines of wattle cottages built to accommodate the native garrison, in strength a company. The fort crowns a high, sheer, and rocky neck of land which, projecting boldly into the lake, divides it into two small bays, each fringed with a curved strip of sand, white and even as the half-moon on a lady's finger-nail.

At the back of these beaches, under the shade, such as it is, of baobabs and borassus palms, a few score of grass-thatched huts are to be seen, the habitations of the aborigines. Besides the fort, which, from its lofty site, looks down with an almost seigneurial air on these humble dwellings, there is no European settlement within many days' journey of the place. At that time only a few small steamers plied on the lake, at very irregular

intervals, nor had the wires of the transcontinental telegraph crossed the Zambesi.

In this secluded corner of the earth Daunt Tremenere had now spent rather more than two years discharging the double duties of military commandant and civil administrator. The news of Brackenham's marriage had reached him a few months after his arrival in Africa, and he had schooled himself long since to think of it calmly when he thought of it at all, which was not often, for his work was exacting and left him little leisure for unprofitable reflection.

With the natives he was singularly popular, his faults not being of the kind that matter much in such a situation, while his good qualities were precisely those which appeal most directly to the confidence of subject races. Whatever the shortcomings of our rural aristocracy may be, it has always produced a large proportion of men in whom the habit of command and the sense of responsibility are instinctive—men who have been bred through generations to the daily exercise of authority and have learnt to use it without favour and without self-consciousness as a natural trust. Now, Daunt Tremenere, peculiar in his defects, approximated in his merits to the best traditions of the caste in which he had been born. His obstinate and scornful temper, his secretive tendencies, his incapacity for quick enthusiasms, his curious and often unreasonable prejudices—these were failings all his own. But in his attachment to duty, in his unbending sense of honour, in his truthfulness and courage, in his pride of race, and in a certain tenderness for the innocent and helpless, he was typical of what used to be meant by the word gentleman.

Primitive people, as any one will tell you who knows them at first hand, are wonderfully quick at reading the characters of their rulers. The natives at Fort Felix saw, at once, that Tremenere was emphatically a man

to be trusted and obeyed, and they asked nothing more. The coldness of manner which had so often puzzled or rebuffed his own countrymen in no way alienated the simple blacks. On parade, and in the judgment-seat, this European was something of a terror truly; but, even so, he was just. Never from his lips the peevish oath or from his hand the wanton blow. His camp was never starved, nor his carriers overdriven and underpaid. When plague was in the land had he not healed the sick? And in the villages did he not always stop and speak kindly to the children playing in the *bwalo* * and to the old people as they sat outside their huts in the sunshine?

So it came to be said that this *Bwana* † notwithstanding his grave face and his strange eyes, as clear as a leopard's, was not one to be feared or avoided, unless it were by shirkers, or such as wrought evil. Round the fires at night, when the villagers assemble together and all things are freely discussed, he was well spoken of. Teremani they called him, that being the nearest equivalent to his patronymic that their tongues could compass, and the name spread till it became a household word, not only among the Atonga of the littoral, but beyond them, into the mysterious hinterland, where dwelt the warlike Angoni of the hills.

Be it said that at the time I speak of these Angoni were the scourge and terror of all the western lake shore. They did not belong to the aboriginal stock of that country. They were Zulus, whom the anger of the notorious Chaka had driven out of the Zulu confederation some sixty years earlier. The wanderings of this lost tribe, from the time of its expulsion until its final settlement, form one of the most romantic chapters in

* *Bwalo*, an open space to be seen in the centre of every African village.

† *Bwana*, Lord, Master (Ki-Swahili).

African history—so far, at least, as we can judge from the little that we know of them.

All the participants in that great trek have now passed away. Zongindaba their chief, who led it, has been more than half a century in his grave, for he did not long survive the end of that strange pilgrimage; but his son, Chenjovu the Elephant, succeeding him, reigned nigh forty years in his stead.

When Daunt Tremenere came to Fort Felix this same Chenjovu was alive, and in the full exercise of despotic power—a grim, imperious, slave-raiding old savage, the abiding terror of all neighbouring tribes, more especially of the lake dwellers, whom he heartily despised as being eaters of fish (a thing abominable to the Angoni); and whose peaceful villages he would surround in the darkness from time to time, and set ablaze, partly for the sake of loot, partly out of stark devilry, as coolly as you or I might smoke out a bees' nest.

Fort Felix had been established with the benevolent object of putting some sort of bounds to this marauding, but not much can be accomplished in that way with one company of native infantry and a single machine gun, as Daunt soon discovered. He wrote to Headquarters accordingly, asking for reinforcements and suggesting a punitive expedition. But Headquarters being rather hard up just then, and much preoccupied with other matters, ri-posted, in characteristic fashion, by requesting Captain Tremenere to confine his operations to the vicinity of his own station—or in other words, to mind his own business.

This made him very angry and led him, in the end, to take a step which any one with much experience of African savages would have told him was suicidal. It happened in this way.

A massacre, rather more extensive than usual, had occurred some thirty miles up the coast. According to

their invariable custom the Angoni had attacked suddenly, just before dawn, and, finishing their bloody business in a couple of hours, were halfway back to their mountains before the wretched survivors of the raid reached Fort Felix.

Unless I have very badly described Daunt Tremenere's character you will understand that he was not the man to shrug his shoulders over this sort of thing. The plight of the unhappy fugitives moved him to a certain pity, as well it might. His sense of responsibility likewise was sharply touched. The Angoni forays had been increasing lately both in frequency and audacity, and this was the biggest and the most impudent that had happened within his experience. Something must be done about it—but what? Pursuit was out of the question. The robbers had too long a start to be overtaken, and to follow them into their own country at the head of a hundred men would have been the act of a lunatic. Daunt thought it over for half an hour and decided to go alone.

Perhaps he did not realize what he was about. Perhaps, on the other hand, it was one of those inspirations, transcending conscious reason, which are vouchsafed at times to quite ordinary people.

The dismay of his soldiery, when they heard of it, was almost comical.

Could such a thing really be? Yes? Then it only remained to inquire what madness had smitten this Bwana. He would be eaten up of course. And what would be said of the company if it stayed behind?

However, the company had to stay behind, because it was given no choice. And so with wonder and deep misgiving it beheld its captain ride forth one misty morning and strained its collective eye to follow him as long as might be, until his figure paled to a mere phantom in the distance and was gone.

The dun pony Popcorn was a screw, but a good one. His queer angular body was as tough as steel, his courage indomitable, and he had those nimble quasi-prehensile feet that enable such little beasts to climb and cling where a more powerful animal would be brought to a standstill.

But the way was long and broken, and twilight had nearly come when the rider halted awhile on the watershed that divides the Angoni plateau from the lakeward slopes. He cast the reins from his stiffened fingers upon the pony's wet neck. His feet, plucked from the stirrups, hung carelessly. Thus at ease, and half dreaming in the saddle, he surveyed the great tableland before him, and the fair hues of evening so effectively displayed in successive curtains or strata ; pearly greys and lilacs and opalescent greens melting, without noticeable transition, into deep, soft purples, shot, on their earthward edges, with one long narrow ribbon of chrome.

An hour since it had been bright day. Now that single gilt streak on the horizon alone remained to mark the path by which the radiant sun had lately moved, as trails of phosphorescence shine and fade in the wake of a ship that passes by night across the gloom of the seas. The air was so perfectly still that the village fires in the plain glowed almost with the steadiness of lamps, a stalk of smoke mounting from each, direct and unwavering, to lose itself at last in the absorption of space.

As Daunt gazed at all those clustering lights a sinister foreboding for an instant crossed his mind. It was a bold cast that he was making. What if he had miscalculated after all ? It would be a disagreeable end to everything. However, such reflections could do no good now. He dismissed them abruptly, and, catching up the reins, touched Popcorn with both spurs. The little fellow, who had been half asleep, bucked twice, in proof of undiminished vigour, and resuming his indefatigable

amble, entered the narrow and crooked way that led to Chenjovu's kraal.

It is not unlikely that the adventurer might have been knocked on the head by the first villagers he met, if it had not been for his pony. To this day horses are rare in any part of Namasiland, which, being mostly a fly country, does not suit them. At that time they were absolutely unknown to the Angoni of the plateau, so that if a hippogriff had descended out of the sunset, it could scarcely have caused more awe and wonder than did the appearance of the little cast polo mount which Daunt had bought for thirty guineas at an auction in Natal. On every side people ran from their huts to behold the singular creature, backing away next minute in utter consternation, their hands raised to high heaven.

Daunt hailed them, but none would draw near him. The hubbub increased, and he dismounted, leaving the pony to itself. Satisfied as it seemed by this, that he was not, at any rate, part and parcel of the apparition, a few men came slowly forward, to which bold minority others soon acceded, until Daunt found himself in the midst of a large throng of persons.

These, in the uncertain light, had an aspect curiously wild and martial. Many of the men were but newly returned from the warpath. They were of that impi which had raided the lake shore forty-eight hours since, and still wore the picturesque battle-dress of their tribe : the dark feathery headpiece and furry kilt, with great oval shields, and shining assegais. Others appeared almost naked, carrying knobkerries in their hands.

Ominous as all this looked, there was, in fact, no disposition on the part of the crowd to be aggressive. The visitor was protected by the mystery of his advent, and the predominant feeling towards him now was one of intense curiosity.

"*Habari ?*" ("How is it ?") a voice said at last, using

the Swahili tongue most commonly employed in addressing Europeans. It was a man of some fifty years who spoke, his brows bound with the rubber ring of the induna.

"*Jéma*," ("It is well,") Daunt answered, rather sulkily, for he was very tired and did not relish being a raree show.

"Is it peace?" the same voice asked.

The Englishman laughed contemptuously, stretching his defenceless hands towards them.

"See!" he cried, "am I not a lone man, and unarmed? Surely ye are answered."

This mixture of boldness and simplicity made a good impression, and a murmur of acquiescence ran through the crowd. In the midst of it came messengers in hot haste from Chenjovu himself. The chief, it seemed, was as curious as his people, and would see the white man instantly. Daunt, however, declined to move till he had off-saddled and fed his pony, which done, he followed the envoys.

The royal hut stood at some little distance from the rest and was enclosed by a palisade, of which the stakes had sprouted as they stood and formed a leafy screen. The entrance was low and the interior dark, save for a wood fire glowing dully in the midst. As Daunt stood on the threshold, trying to peer into the shadowy recess before him, a deep voice issued from the gloom.

"*Tikuonani*," ("I see thee,") it said, using the customary formula by which an Angoni chief acknowledges a stranger's presence. Next moment a hand stirred the dying fire, which, flaming up from its centre with a crackle of displaced ashes, revealed plainly the figure of an old man sitting beside it.

Well had this man been named Chenjovu, the Elephant. His bodily frame was little short of gigantic, and age had increased its bulk. His face looked severe,

but it was neither a brutal nor a stupid face. For an African native the man was very old—between seventy and eighty it seemed.

"I know thee," he said at last, gazing fixedly at his visitor. "Thou art, without doubt, that Teremani of whom I have heard."

The soldier inclined his head.

"And thou art here alone—wherefore I judge thee a fool."

A harsh laugh, ventral rather than guttural, broke from him as he spoke.

"Nay!" Tremenere answered coolly; "for if any evil befall me at thy hands or at the hands of thy people, the folly is thine, *Atati*." *

"How?" exclaimed the Zulu, astonished.

Daunt smiled.

"To thy young men," he went on, "I would speak of the vengeance that falls like fire upon them that shed the blood of my race. I would tell them of things they never saw or dreamed of. I would say that the anger of the *Azungu* † speaks through the mouths of guns that blast the very rocks and shake the earth with thunder. Father, we say that when the beard is tender, the blood is hot. But to thee, wise in council, I teach not wisdom. I have said in my heart, Chenjovu, old in years, is old in knowledge. Therefore, desiring thy friendship, I am come as a friend comes—alone, unbidden, weaponless, and not afraid."

Had Daunt rehearsed this little speech for a week it could not have been better timed. Like all savage potentates Chenjovu was vain. As in his youth he had exulted in his colossal bodily strength, so now, in his declining years, he piqued himself much on the score

* *Atati*, Father. The word is commonly used by way of courtesy towards persons of high rank or great age.

† *Azungu*, white men.

of judgment. Daunt's tribute therefore touched him in a vulnerable spot, and indeed it was not undeserved, for he was quite shrewd enough to see that there was truth in the stranger's warning. From the first he had never really intended any harm to his visitor. The cases of other tribes had taught him that white men could never be molested with impunity, and though war, as he understood it, had no terrors for him, he knew that a war waged by Europeans was not an end in itself, as with his own countrymen, but a means to introduce everything that he hated and dreaded—new laws and customs, the school, the church, the prison, magistrates, policemen, tax-gatherers—the whole odious machinery of civilized government.

"So," he said presently; "then what is thy purpose here?"

The Englishman roused the fire again with the toe of his boot.

"Listen, father," he said; "I am as I have told thee, a soldier, bidden to keep the peace of the lake shores. Chenjovu, the shadow of the Angoni impis darkens the coasts of Nyasa. The blood of fisherfolk cries against thee—harmless folk, Chenjovu, who never wronged thee or thine. Is it well?"

The old man stared at him and burst into a shout of laughter.

"Ay!" he exclaimed. "The ways of thy race are strange ways, and the purposes of their hearts not to be understood. To this end then, thy grave face and wise words! For the sake of a few Atonga thou art adventured so far; dogs and slaves, eaters of slime, whom I have harried more years than thou hast drawn breath."

"So; but if the lives of these men be so little in thy sight, give them to me. To give what we despise is easy."

"Ahé! thy tongue is cunning. The life of an ox is of small account, my son, but shall I give thee my herds therefore?"

Daunt bit his lip to hide a smile.

"They say," the chief went on, "those white men at the Missions, that peace is good. Ay; it is good maybe for the Atonga and the Anyanja, sowers and reapers and catchers of fish, but we are not of their blood; our ways are not their ways. Before I was, and before my fathers were, the Amazulu lived by war, and from the loins of the Amazulu the Angoni are sprung."

"War!" exclaimed the Englishman scornfully. "Is it war then to steal women and to slay the defenceless? Nay! that is not the trade of warriors, Chenjovu; it is the trade of robbers. Where no danger is, no glory can be."

Instantly, as if he had been struck, the dark blood leapt into the Zulu's face. His eyes flashed into sudden anger.

"And thou thyself what dost thou here?" he cried loudly. "Thou who art bidden to keep the peace of the shores against my impis, canst thou not keep it by the strong hand, that thou comest hither seeking to win it by words? The Atonga are my cattle. Defend them if thou wilt, but, since thou too art a warrior and speakest of danger and glory, defend them with thy sword."

The logic of this was cutting enough. Tremeneré saw that he had made a false step, and, changing his ground, exhausted all his powers of diplomacy, yet, as it seemed, in vain. Chenjovu's irritation soon passed, it is true, but he remained calmly obdurate, and Daunt rose to depart at last with an uneasy feeling that his mission had ended in failure.

"Out of the fullness of my heart I have spoken," he

said, "and would that we two saw as one in this matter, for I seek no quarrel with thee or thine. In thy haste thou hast answered me and I go. Yet in the end my purpose shall prevail; yea, though thou slay me where I stand. For behind my will is the will of my government, never to be gainsaid." He paused and traced with his stick two divergent lines upon the ground. "See," he said earnestly, "here are two paths before thee where to choose—this, and that. Decide thou. I have done my part. But if thou goest by the evil way and trouble befall, then shalt thou remember this hour, when I came to thee in friendship and thou didst deny me."

He turned as he spoke and went out into the starlit night.

"Now I wonder what is going to happen," he thought. "I daresay the old beggar will have me speared or knocked on the head. Anyhow, I'm afraid I've done more harm than good. Well, it can't be helped."

He made his way to the hut reserved for him, and, dismissing from his mind all thought of what had so much engaged it, fell at once into the dreamless sleep of physical exhaustion.

CHAPTER IX

A MAN OF GREAT ACCOUNT

I FANCY very few people at home have any idea yet how delightful the climate of the mid-African uplands can be at certain seasons of the year. Unfortunately some of the rich and leisured classes are just beginning to find it out, and are turning the Kenya plateaux and places like that into the abomination of fashionable resorts; but among the great non-travelling public there is a general notion still that the tropics are uniformly hot and feverish, whereas, in fact of course, everything depends upon altitude. You can get any temperature you like by climbing for it, from the furnace of the ocean littoral to the icy solitudes of the great inland mountain ranges, where men have been frozen to death within a few degrees of the Equator itself. Between these extremes, say at five thousand feet, or thereabout, climatic conditions, during a great part of the year, are as perfect as any that can be enjoyed, say, in New Zealand, or Switzerland, or the Riviera.

Morning broke on Chenjovu's kraal in all the freshness and brilliance of the Angoniland winter. The air blew sweet from grassy slopes and distant forests. In the valley bottoms the mists of night, cleft by the rising sun, hung still in little fleecy masses, their upper edges

breaking and curling away continually into the illimitable blue.

Daunt's spirits rose as he left his hut and sniffed the keen clear dawn. Even Popcorn felt its freshening influence and fidgeted incessantly in his eagerness to be saddled and away. Early though it was, crowds of natives had assembled at a little distance to watch the departure of their unbidden guest. None of them spoke, and their faces, Daunt thought, looked dubious and sullen. The news of his mission must have been bruited already, and these people, he reflected, could hardly look upon him otherwise than coldly, for, if not their actual enemy, was he not, at any rate, the self-constituted champion of those whom they hated and despised? In the circumstances he felt himself lucky to have escaped personal molestation. As for the Atonga, it was greatly to be feared that his intervention would have an effect the very opposite of what he had intended.

In this he was not mistaken. The purpose of his visit was by now generally known and bitterly resented, so that as he rode away the kraal began to hum like an angry hive. Everywhere there was a feeling that the independence of the tribe had been challenged. Such an affront must not pass. Plainly, the right way to meet it was by launching another raid upon the Fish Eaters as soon as might be. Among the younger folk some wild talk went about even of attacking Fort Felix itself. But what said Chenjovu? A deputation waited on him to inquire.

"Let my councillors debate this matter," the old man answered shortly.

So they assembled forthwith, sitting, as such conclaves always do, in the *bwalo*, an open space to be found near the centre of every African village. Behind the tribal sages and the grown warriors stood the youths, behind these again the women. Chenjovu himself occupied the

place of honour within the inner ring. Remaining seated he related accurately, but without comment, the substance of what Tremenere had said the evening before, and as soon as he had ended, his councillors rose successively to pronounce their opinions.

The venerable elders spoke first, after them the more experienced among the warriors. To a man, they expressed the same view. The Atonga were the predestined quarry of the Angoni. Where else could the tribe procure its slaves and concubines, its hewers of wood and drawers of water? And, if there was to be no more raiding of the low country, how were the young men to blood their spears? They sought no quarrel with Teremani, but this was a matter outside his jurisdiction. He had with him no more than a hundred soldiers. Were the Angoni then to bow to his will, whose impi * counted their thousands?

As the discussion progressed in this strain the excitement of the assembly increased. In particular the younger folk, excluded from active participation in the debate, swarmed restlessly behind the orators, breaking in upon their utterances with frequent, shrill applause. Chenjovu alone seemed unmoved, who was in truth more moved than any, for his mind was now set upon a course which ran counter to the declared judgment of all his advisers. In the still, dark hours following his visitor's departure, the old chief had had leisure to review the situation calmly. Notwithstanding the irritation he had shown at their interview, the Englishman's candour and firmness had impressed him very deeply. The ethical sentiments of the white man, indeed, were as incomprehensible to him as to the rest of his tribe. He still believed, as all the Angoni believed, that the Atonga were his cattle (*nyama*), and

* *Impi* (Zulu), a regiment.

it was strange, he thought, that one like Teremani should condescend to mediate on behalf of such wretches. Yet he was moved, in spite of himself, towards this singular man, so proud and fearless, and a rare impulse urged him to retain, if it were possible, his proffered friendship. To that end he was prepared to make great concessions. As yet indeed, he would commit himself to no formal pact with Teremani, but neither would he yield to the importunity of his people, eager as they were to assert the tribal claim by fresh reprisals.

None the less the old chief had shrewdness enough to be conscious that even the most thorough autocracy has its limits. In extending to the Atonga even a qualified protection, he was embarking on an extreme exercise of power. To announce such a purpose in the present temper of his audience was a very bold step, and, though its risks did not deter him, he chose his words with unusual care.

Yet weigh and guard them as he might, nothing could make them acceptable to his hearers. As he began to speak inarticulate cries of protest and astonishment arose, followed by a tense and ominous silence, which continued for some moments after he had finished. The assembly seemed as if struck dumb, until of a sudden Mbarakelwa, the most renowned and impetuous of his warriors, sprang forward. The man's eyes were blazing; his appearance seemed like that of one transported. Instinctively, without word given, the chief's bodyguard, which stood directly behind him, moved up and surrounded his person. Meanwhile Mbarakelwa had halted within a few feet of where the old man sat.

"Accursed be the hour," he cried, "in which thou hast betrayed thy people. Would I had slain this Teremani with my hands, ere his spell was cast on thee, to turn thy blood to water. Thou art no longer Chenjovu the Elephant, nor I thy servant any more. See!"

he exclaimed, touching the hilt of his broad bladed assegai, "here is my spear! It smells of the blood of our enemies! In a hundred battles it has struck home for thee——"

At this fatal moment he shifted his grasp on the weapon, which had hitherto been held, as etiquette required, with the point reversed, and lifted it suddenly, with intent to break it in two. But the leader of the royal bodyguard mistook the purport of the movement, and, believing his chief to be threatened, he strode forward in an instant, and with his heavy knobkerry dealt Mbarakelwa a blow between the eyes, the sound of which was heard in every part of the assembly.

As the unhappy man fell, like a bullock beneath the pole axe, a deep murmur rose from the bystanders and swelled into a prolonged and sinister cry. The great crowd, stirred to its depths, broke and pressed forward. The men of the bodyguard closed their ranks and lifted their weapons. Chenjovu saw that a bloody collision was imminent, and, rising to his feet, he faced the multitude with extended arms.

"Back!" he shouted loudly. "Back, guards! Back, people! Be silent and hear me!"

His towering stature, his resonant voice dominated the whole scene. At sight and speech of him, the ancient habit of obedience asserted itself. The contending passions of a thousand men recoiled before his will as waves before a physical barrier. The guards halted. The crowd stood, trembling with excitement.

"See!" the old man cried, pointing to the prone body at his feet. "The stroke that slew him was over hasty, yet was his punishment just for his lips had spoken evil. Is my blood turned to water? Nay!"—he drew a knife from his girdle and roughly opened a vein in his arm, from which the crimson drops welled and trickled upon the ground—"Behold!" he exclaimed,

stretching the lacerated limb towards them, "the blood of your father flows in your sight; the blood of Chenjovu, the son of Zongindaba. Yes! I am he. My children," he went on, pointing again to the dead figure before him, "Mbarakelwa vaunted his hundred battles. What are they to me who had fought as many ere he drew breath? He was a great warrior—aye; but for every scar upon his body ye shall count three on mine."

As he spoke, he flung aside the lion skin that hung from his shoulders, and showed his naked breast, covered with wounds.

The words were right; the action was right. Like all born leaders of men, whether savage or civilized, Chenjovu's instinct in such things was unerring. By it his dominion had been won and maintained through every extremity, nor did it fail him now. The mastery of his voice, the dignity of his presence, the moving spectacle of his bared and stricken body swept the crowd to a quick revulsion of feeling. The old chief saw that the crisis was past. He raised his hand.

"Hearken yet a little," he said. "Ye are my children, but ye are men; therefore I would that ye follow me, not blindly, but with understanding. Here is no mystery nor any secret dealing. My purpose is open. Read it in my words, and, as ye read, so answer. I say again the Atonga are less than nothing in my sight. But Teremani is a man. I have searched his heart and found it whole. I looked for guile, and I met truth. I looked for doubt, and I saw courage. I looked for folly, and I discerned wisdom. He came unarmed, yet not afraid; alone, yet stronger than a multitude. This is a man of great account. I know men and I am not mistaken. His goodwill is worthy to be sought, yet I seek it not for my sake alone. I am old; this present world grows dim before my sight, but I look beyond it, into the shadows, and I see far and true."

He paused and gazed fixedly into the distance, as if contemplating some visible object.

"I look into the future," he repeated. "I who belong to the past, and I say to you that I would have this man to be my friend; but, above all things, I would have him to be the friend of my people in the day when I am no more."

Upon that he ceased, yet remained standing as before, pillar-like in his height and bulk, the great arch of his chest uncovered to the winter wind, his deepset eyes still fixed upon space like the eyes of a seer. The crowd beheld him with a kind of awe. An induna stepped forward.

"High-born," he said, "thou art indeed our father. Be it done as thou wilt. Only this I would say. We, the Angoni, abide here, for here is our home. But the Azungu come and go; their home is far away. So in the end Teremani also will depart hence to his own people and be seen of us no more. How then? Another will come in his stead—a stranger, we know not who."

The chief looked at him steadfastly. "What I have said I have said," he answered slowly. "But I have spoken of Teremani, whom I know, and not of any other. My trust is in him and not in another. For the stranger, how can I answer, and for the day when he shall come how shall I ask a pledge?"

Daunt had quitted the plateau in some disgust, feeling that he had been a fool to go there at all. He had only provoked the Angoni, and another raid, he thought, was certain to be the near consequence. Well, since diplomacy had failed, he must try other means. He had no doubt of being able to deal with the plunderers if he could intercept them with his whole company, or perhaps even with a platoon. But to effect this he must have early knowledge of their movements. Hitherto appeals for

succour had not reached Fort Felix till the raiders were in retreat, and that was too late. If he could only get news of an approaching foray before it had taken effect, Daunt thought he could forestall it yet—or if that should be impossible, he could almost certainly push between the robbers and their hills and force them to fight.

With this purpose then he caused Atonga scouts to be posted in every pass through which an enemy could issue, and beacons to be piled ready for kindling, so that, once lit, their warning flares should run from end to end of the coast. The Angoni, he knew, always attacked at dawn, and marched consequently at night, when the beacon fires would be plain to see.

These arrangements made, he awaited the result confidently enough. It was a nuisance of course having to keep the garrison practically standing to arms without knowing when or where the Angoni would appear; but their onset he felt sure would not be long delayed. Great then was his wonderment when day followed day and nothing happened. The anxious sentinels watching the mountain defiles with nerves at full stretch saw no glitter but of the water torrents, heard no sound but of the wind. Weeks passed into months, winter into spring, spring into summer, and, for the first time in its history, deep peace brooded over the littoral of Nyasa. The timid villagers, quick, like all the Bantu race, to forget a danger that has ceased to be imminent, began to emerge from the miserable shelters—one can hardly call them dwellings—tunnelled in cliffs or pile-borne in the midst of swamps and lagoons, where they had been wont to seek safety from their hereditary enemies. New settlements arose in the open plains, cattle grazed over wider pastures, and crops sprang up where, till that day, no man had dared to break the virgin earth.

Daunt Tremenere saw all this with infinite content, but he was inclined none the less to be distrustful of a

respite which, at the worst, might be designed to stifle suspicion, and, at the best, could only be due to the restraining influence of one old man. Whatever Chenjovu's motives might be, Daunt felt that, as yet, he could not count with any confidence on the Angoni themselves, and, in this, he was right. The tribe was holding its hand because its chief so willed, and for no other reason. To it, collectively, Daunt was no more, at that time, than any other white man, nor was it clear how he could hope to be. But opportunity came presently to him, albeit in gruesome guise.

Of the many terrors which beset life in the tropics, none recurs more persistently or with more devastating effect than epidemic disease, and, of all such diseases, small-pox is perhaps the worst.

Now, about the time I am speaking of, it happened that this scourge of God fell with uncommon severity on the Angoni country. It was of the type professionally known as "confluent"; an innocent word diverted to a meaning singularly repellent. The natives recognized the disease readily enough—it had swept their villages many times before—but they knew it only as a mysterious visitation, which always reappeared among them at uncertain intervals, and took its toll of human lives and passed away. They ascribed it, as they ascribe all such afflictions, to a supernatural source. Against it, while it endured, they knew not how to contend, save through the ministrations of witch-doctors, and by invocation of the shadowy gods of tribal mythology. It was a thing to be borne as patiently as might be—that was all. So the pestilence raged without let; the living sat with folded hands, the sick lay where they were stricken, surrounded by devil dancers and exorcisers, and, thus passing, were cast every day, by scores, into the graveyards of the forest.

Before news of what was toward came to Daunt at Fort Felix infection had near overrun the whole plateau. To send to headquarters for medical aid was the first and most obvious step, but headquarters were a fortnight away. A month or more must therefore pass before succour could be expected from that direction. Meanwhile, if the plague was not to spread beyond controllable bounds, something must be done to hold it in check, and to this arduous business Daunt Tremenere now addressed himself, for the all sufficient reason that there was nobody else to do it.

Whoso embarks on such a task in such surroundings will find assuredly the weight and complication of its difficulties far greater than his expectations had forecast. Before he can hope to combat the pestilence itself he must set his whole endeavour to overcome the ignorance, the lethargy, the manifold prejudices of those whom he seeks to aid. And if he achieves so much he must start on his ultimate labours with an equipment miserably inadequate to his purposes. He should be a man then ready of resource, apt in the contrivance of shifts, resolute to bend circumstances to his need. He must be proof against the utmost spite of the elements, content to take food and sleep where and when he can get them, at strange hours and in uncertain measure, with a mind not to be shaken by mischance, and strong, above all, to conquer that revolt of the senses which turns even the pitying from what is loathsome.

There was not in Daunt Tremenere—there is in few—the fire of the born philanthropist, the rare overmastering compassion which makes ministration to the afflicted a delight in itself ; but there was the next best thing, that unbending sense of duty which supplies the place of natural enthusiasm and drives men to crusades in cold blood. Frankly he hated what he was undertaking, ay, and dreaded it too, for like many physically

brave men he was strangely pervious to the horror of bodily contamination. In his view what lay before him was simply part of his trust, an ugly and probably a thankless job, yet too plainly within the scope of his stewardship to be avoided, and as such he set about it.

Bringing with him a tent, stores, and porters he readily obtained permission to camp on the plateau, where the Angoni received him civilly, but without enthusiasm. His plans for the isolation of the sick and other uninteresting measures met with scant response. The pestilence indeed seemed generally to be regarded as expressing the will of some irritable deity, who might be mollified by appropriate sacrifices and incantations, but with whom otherwise it would be idle and perhaps dangerous to interfere. In a case like this Teremani could do nothing. He had better go back to his fort. But Teremani was not to be gainsaid. He developed a truly inexhaustible obstinacy, protested here, persuaded there, gained at last a few half-hearted recruits, a little dubious co-operation, and pushed that slender advantage to the uttermost.

With wonderment the Angoni saw him toil early and late. He and his pony soon became familiar objects in every village on the plateau. It could not be denied either that wherever he was supported and obeyed the epidemic somehow began to subside. That might be mere chance; still the people came slowly to perceive, at any rate, the sincerity of his purpose, and, shamed by his unceasing activity, lent him a more ready aid. Fenced hospital camps sprang up in every stricken centre, wherein the sick were carefully tended. In other camps the doubtful cases, "contacts" as they are technically called, were secluded in the same way. Guards were set upon the water supplies. The dead were no longer pitched into shallow holes or left to rot in the bush, but committed fairly to earth, while

their clothing, utensils, everything that could carry infection, was heaped together day by day and burnt to harmless ashes.

These lay measures could not wholly banish the disease, but at least they stayed it, and as the death roll began slowly to abate so Daunt's prestige increased. Nothing, in truth, could have stood him in better stead with the Angoni than this chance emergency had done. He had moved among them in the most intimate and homely fashion, yet girt with all the assurance of a deliverer, and had set bounds to a menace which, till then, they had always deemed irresistible. To Chenjovu especially this was a double source of satisfaction. Not only had the tribe been brought out of a great peril, but his own confidence in Teremani had been signally justified, as he was not slow to point out to his abashed and contrite subjects.

When at last the anxiously expected doctor arrived he listened in amazement to Daunt's report.

"I think you'll find everything going on pretty well," the latter said. "Isolation camps and all that, you know. We've done what was possible, and the situation is tolerably in hand. Of course I've had no drugs or vaccine or anything of that sort—shouldn't have known how to use them if I had. However, now you're here, you can take the lead and do all the various things I've had to leave undone. I don't suppose it will be long before you give the place a clean bill of health again."

The doctor pursed his lips, "Will these people take kindly to vaccination do you think?" he asked. "They have the reputation of being rather difficult. I'd better have a police escort I suppose."

"Good Lord!" Daunt exclaimed irritably. "That would spoil the whole thing. You don't know the Angoni, Platt. They aren't like ordinary natives a bit, and it's no use trying to dragoon them. No need to either.

You may find them rather queer at first, but they're good fellows really when one gets to understand them. I've been alone here for the best part of a month and had no trouble at all, nor will you. I can promise you so much. I've explained who you are of course, and that they must do what you tell them."

"The devil you have," the doctor rejoined. "Well, look here, you've got to do what I tell you too, and I order you to knock off work straight away. I don't much like the looks of you," he added, staring at Daunt's unshaven face and tired eyes. "Had a roughish time up here, haven't you?"

"Oh! I don't know. Not more so than I expected. I've had to go a bit short of sleep."

"So I should imagine. Well, turn in now and get as much as you can. And see here; there's no need for you to stay any longer. Get away back to Fort Felix to-morrow. Everything seems to be cut and dried here, thanks to you. My own orderlies will give me all the help I want. Good-night."

He watched Daunt's retreating figure for a minute or two.

"Good man that," he said to himself.

CHAPTER X

OF BATTLES LONG AGO

THE time came for Daunt to take his home leave at last, an event to which, as long as it lay in the more distant future, he had given very little thought. Yet now, as the day drew near, he found himself beginning to anticipate it with a strange eagerness. He tried to persuade himself that this after all was due to quite ordinary causes ; that what he felt was no more than any man would naturally feel at the prospect of tasting the comforts of civilization again after such long abstinence.

The commonplace pleasures and everyday conveniences which custom so stales for stay-at-home folk have, in truth, a rare piquancy for the returning exile. Men dream of them in the forests and deserts, counting, like schoolboys, the days which must pass before they shall be enjoyed again. It would be pleasant to see, once more, the lights of London ; pleasant to be whirled about in express trains and motor cars, to frequent clubs and theatres, to get everything done by pressing buttons and pulling wires, to eat other things than fowl and goat. Pleasant, yes ; but the thought of such things does not make the heart beat as Daunt's beat now. The growing vehemence of his longing perturbed him. What did England hold for him still that he should look there so ardently ?

He made a gesture of impatience, as though to dissipate some hopeless fancy.

"What a fool I am!" he said aloud. "It won't do though. I can't risk it yet. I'll ask them to let me stay here a little longer."

As it happened the Government was rather short of military officers just then and acceded without difficulty to a request so parallel with its own convenience; but when another year had passed and there was a full establishment again, Daunt was commanded to proceed on leave without delay. A certain relief filled his mind as he read the curt official decree. This was a plain order; a thing not to be questioned. It rested with him no longer whether he should go or stay. In three days the little gunboat that plied on the lake would call at Fort Felix and take him on board.

That night he packed such remnants of his personal belongings as three years' sojourn in the wilderness had left to him, and at daybreak rode forth to pay his only farewell visit. Little more than twelve months gone he had travelled by that same way on a hope that had seemed then truly forlorn, a stranger, a suspect, to be met with dark looks and sullen words. Now he was known and welcome on all the Angoni plateau. At every village men turned to salute him with the grave courtesy so characteristic of the Zulu; women ceased their eternal pounding of corn to smile upon him; even the small children staggered forward on wavering legs, eager to stroke his pony, once the object of so many fears.

It was sundown when he reached Chenjovu's kraal. The news of his advent had preceded him with that mysterious swiftness which has puzzled so many African travellers, and he was at once admitted to the royal hut. The old chief received the tidings of his approaching departure quietly enough.

"Thou goest then to thine own people," he said. "So be it. I am sore for thy going. Outside is far away.* Yet I see in thine eyes that thy spirit is uplifted."

"Father, for forty moons I have not beheld my country. Cannot joy and sorrow abide together in the hearts of men?"

"It is so," the Zulu answered. "Thou dost well to rejoice, my son; and well to grieve a little also."

Trëmenere paused.

"Tell me," he asked, "are we at one purpose, thou and I? Is there peace between us?"

The Zulu gazed at him astonished.

"Ay! there is peace," he said, "and there is that which passeth peace. How shouldst thou doubt it? Our hearts are white for thee."

"Promise me this then," the soldier said, "for it is all I ask. Another when I am gone hence will replace me. Be thou his friend, Chenjovu, as thou art mine. As it is between me and thy people, so be it between him and them also."

As he spoke he looked into the other's eyes and his heart misgave him.

"My son," the Zulu answered sadly, "ask of me what I can bestow. How shall I pledge thee the future who am a man of long ago †—ay! and very near to death? Teremani, listen! Thou hast ridden this day through the maize fields of my people. How is it with the young corn?"

"It is well," Daint answered. "A man might stand therein and be hidden to his middle."

"Even so. Yet I say that before the green cob swells in the husk there shall be no more Chenjovu. Of

* *Kunja kuli kutari*, "Outside is far away." An African proverb.

† *Muntu wa kali*, "A man of long ago"—i.e., an old man.

this I speak not again. But tell me, since thou wilt leave us, dost thou know this man who cometh in thy stead ? ”

There was no reply.

“ Wilt thou answer then for him thou knowest not ? Wilt thou answer for them that shall send him, for the elders of thy race that sit in the high places of the Council, rulers of lands they never saw, saying thus and thus it shall be done ? Thou who art a warrior, a man of plain dealings, wilt thou answer for them that govern by craft of the written word ? Pledge me these things, Teremani, and I will pledge thee the hearts of the Angoni in the day when I am no more.”

Tremenere had meditated a conventional reply, some general expression of reassurance ; but as the deep voice ceased the empty words he had been framing died upon his lips. The Zulu lay back upon the heap of pelts that formed his couch, staring into the black hollow of the roof above him.

“ Art thou silent ? Then let it pass,” he said after a little. “ And now ere thou goest I would speak to thee of that which I have kept hidden from all men to this day. Yet am I afraid lest, seeking to bring fortune to thy hand, I deliver thee into great perils. For indeed thou art very near to my heart, Teremani.”

The soldier looked up quickly under drawn brows, but said no word.

“ Listen then,” the Zulu went on, “ and I will tell thee a story of the Angoni wanderings that is known to none but me. There was another once that knew it, but he is not.”

He had dropped the Ki-Swahili dialect usually employed in conversing with Europeans, and spoke now in his own tongue, the strange clicking speech of the southern Zulus. Daunt understood enough of it to follow the narrator without much difficulty.

"Thou knowest that I am not of the people of this country," the old man said proudly. "I come of the race of that Chaka the Terrible,* whose name doubtless thou hast heard."

Tremenere nodded.

"Long ago when I was but a tender youth the anger of Chaka fell upon my father, Zongindaba, his near kinsman, whom his guards would have seized and slain, but that we, his sons, stood about him, and would not suffer it. Then the King swore a great oath, and his impis were arrayed to drive us forth of the land; but many coming to our aid—for Zongindaba was much beloved of the people—we set a bold front against them. Ah! Teremani! stripling as I was in that day, the remembrance of it is yet like iron in my soul. I see again the long line of our enemies moving upon the grass veld, its ends flexed like the horns of a young moon; the great ox-hide shields thrown forward, the dark head-plumes tossing free, the quick, bright glitter of assegais. God of Blood! We were so small a host that boys and grey-beards fought among us, side by side with grown men; and they that so beset us were picked warriors, thick as the sands on the sea-beaches of Natal.

"Teremani! it was wonderful! We fought in a ring with no more space between us than to free our arms, but they, being many, came from all sides in line about us, flinging their bare breasts like madmen upon our spears, until the earth reeked, and stank beneath our feet, and yet they could not break us. All day we held them off, but darkness drew in at the last, and despair began to creep about our hearts, for we were now very weary, and but few of us showed unhurt. Of a sudden one cried that Zongindaba himself was mortally stricken,

* Chaka, the African Napoleon, paramount chief of the Zulus.

and, looking round, I saw my father, wounded indeed, and it was for the third time that day, but upright still, his head high, his brandished assegai running red to the grip. The sight of him, thus stoutly upon his defence, nerved our strength anew, and since none among us would be the first to turn, we still made shift to keep our order unbroken, I know not how, supporting each other by the weight of our shoulders, till the sun passed, leaving us in a world full of darkness and blood."

He paused and sighed. Tremenere said nothing.

"In the night," he went on, "urged as it seemed by a common will, yet without word given, we moved away, each on his own line. Our women and children had gone already to a drift on the White Umvolosi, which my father had named to be the gathering-place of those who should escape the death in battle.

"It was a moonless night and well so, since pursuit was hindered thereby; only I feared that my strength would not endure to carry me to the Umvolosi, for that was a far distance, and I a boy, wounded, and it blew bitter cold. Even the well-known sounds of the forest had now a sort of terror for me. I started to hear Chiquasimbi, the little oribi, leap from his bed in the grass, and Mbawala, the bushbuck, bark from the hills. But most of all I dreaded to know that the unclean hyenas followed my steps, and to see, as I saw once, in the midst of a thicket, the pale, cruel eyes of Nyalugwi, the leopard. Yet lo! the god of the Amazulu encompassed my path, defenceless as I was, so that I had no scathe from any beast, neither from those fell spirits that go also in darkness to prey upon our kind.

"All that night I travelled as fast as I was able, sleeping only a little about dawn, and eating such roots and berries as grew by the way, and so went on through the next day, and came, about evening, to the Umvolosi.

Here were assembled our womenfolk and children as I have said, and such of our grown men as had come alive out of the battle. I wondered to behold them, so few they were, yet as I drew near, my heart leapt within me, for I saw that my father, Zongindaba, was among them, and, albeit sorely wounded, his presence was worth an impi to us then. Ah! Teremani! the few words that he spake to us, bitter and brave, and the look in his hawk eyes as he stood and called aloud!

“Forth, my children! Forth, nameless and homeless people! By your spears ye shall live, without pity and without fear, and every man’s hand shall be against you, and your hands against the world. Because ye have neither hearth nor roof-tree, neither flocks nor herds any more, so shall ye couch with Nkandwi, the hill fox, that lieth down where he may, and hunt with Nkango, the lion, that reaveth from one and from all. The home veld of the Amazulu is pleasant and fair, which our eyes shall not behold again, nor the kraals of our fathers wherein we were born, for our feet shall be set in the way of the North, and our faces to the land of the stranger. To everything its appointed course; out of the tender frond the full leaf, and from the rotting ash the bud again. I knew this day would come, even as I know that its avenger cometh, the red hand of Dingaan.* Sotshangani† went out from among us, and I said, in my heart, beware! And Umziligazi† went out, and I said again, beware! And now that which I foresaw is accomplished, and I go also with my people into the North.’”

To what end, you will ask perhaps, this tale of “old

* The tyrant Chaka was killed by his brother and successor, Dingaan.

† Sotshangani and Umziligazi, two celebrated chiefs, were driven out of the Zulu confederacy by the jealousy of Chaka, shortly before the expulsion of Zongindaba.

unhappy far-off things, and battles long ago? " Tremenere himself had no idea, but he knew enough of African character to understand that the Zulu must be let tell his story in his own way. The habit of circumlocution is characteristic of all primitive men, possibly because time means so little to them, nor do they seem to have any clear sense of what we mean by relevancy. Whenever they have anything of moment to relate, their way of setting about it is to begin at some anterior point and work their way, with great plentitude of detail, through everything that happened in the interval, until they arrive at what they wish to tell; a process rather exasperating sometimes to Europeans in a hurry. Daunt, however, who was in no hurry, and who realized that he was listening to a great unrecorded epic of African history from the lips of, probably, its last survivor, would not have shortened the tale by a word, careless to what revelation it led, fearful even to question or comment lest he should break a thread so precious.

Thus, then, he sat in stillness, his chin in his hand, his pipe cold between his teeth, and the untended fire beside him paling into ashes, while the old warrior told of the persistent, eventful march of his broken clan, through Swaziland and Tongaland, how they tarried a little, here and there, as it seemed good, but always, in the end, retook the northward line. He spoke continually of privations and dangers, of hunger and thirst in the deserts, of stricken battles hardly won, of fearful acts of vengeance. He told how his wandering people, forcing their passage through a world thronged with enemies, subdued and drew to themselves the survivors of the wild tribes they vanquished, one after another, until their little desperate band grew into a great mixed host, whereof the original exiles, its overlords, were in number but a fraction; how this strange army, increasing as it went, pushed on and could not rest, driven

as it seemed by some obscure impulse, it knew not why or whither, through the legendary empire of Monomatapa, the ruined and buried cities of Mashonaland, until it came to a river so mysterious and vast * that many feared to cross it, and would have turned back but for the high courage and vehement will of their leader, who, in the end compelled them to pass over with him, one and all, into Sengaland on the farther shore, and so still northward, until, in the third year of their pilgrimage, Nyasa lay before their eyes, and the beautiful hill country of the Tumbuka, where they halted at last and still abide.

The chronicle of these happenings was a long one. It was nigh midnight when Chenjovu said,—

“Thus far thou hast hearkened to me in silence, Teremani, as one man should hearken to another who speaks the story of his life. But that which I have now to relate may touch thee closely. Answer me then—*hast* thou heard tell of Mandanjovu, the Ivory Graves?”

The Englishman started. Who in Central Africa was not familiar with that old tradition of colossal stores of ivory, said to be buried somewhere in the wild lands that lie between Lake Nyasa and the fountains of the Congo? Many adventurers had gone forth at different times in quest of the fabled treasure, always with the same ill success. Some of these had been no more seen; others had reappeared, after protracted wanderings, empty-handed, declaring the whole thing to be a myth, and as such indeed it was now commonly regarded.

“The tale of that place,” Daunt said, “is told at every camp fire. I count it the legend of an idle hour.”

“Ay!” said the Zulu slowly; “and thou art wrong. The place is; my eyes have beheld it.”

* The Zambezi.

CHAPTER XI

A LEGEND OF THE DESERT

CONSCIOUS will can do much in this world, yet it is impossible to help noticing how many things, and among them, very often, the things that mankind most ardently desires, elude deliberate pursuit, to yield themselves, in the end, unsought. Greatness, as has been said, is thrust, not infrequently, upon people who were neither born to it nor wished for it. Kisses go by favour still, and are denied to the eager; and lavished on the indifferent, as Dian's on Endymion long ago. Even thus, without effort or design, came Daunt Tremenere by the secret of the Ivory Graves.

"They were a people few in number," the old man said, "but great of heart, rather hunters than warriors, setting all their strength and skill to the chase of elephants, whereof there was then such abundance in that country as a man might have passed through all Africa and not found the like of it again. Now this hunting they had followed, and their fathers before them, I know not for what uncountable years. Of every beast slain they bartered the upper tusk to Arab dealers from Zanzibar, taking in exchange such trade goods as they needed, for thus it was that they lived, but the other, the ground tusk, they held for sacred, and buried privily in the earth to be a sacrifice to the god of their chase,

whose name was Ar-Toth, the Tracker. No ; these were not black men ; their skin was like new copper, and their speech was not the speech of any Bantu race. Moreover, they were apt in the making of figures and letters upon stone and wood and other mystic arts. It was said that their forefathers had come long since from beyond the great lakes of the North. With neighbouring tribes they had always dwelt in peace, none indeed daring to molest them, because perhaps of their known valour, perhaps too of the awe felt for their strange looks and mild yet fearless bearing, which caused the baser peoples of that country to account them as of more than mortal creation.

“ Some of these stories we heard while we were yet afar off, among the villages of the lower Luangwa, but, in truth, it was no talk to daunt such men as we, bred from the pure and martial stock of the Zulu, and hardened now to every shift of fortune, having come out of such perils already as it seemed none before us could be greater. All that we heard, indeed, made us but the more eager to meet and try the chance of war with a folk reputed so brave and skilful, nor did we doubt what the issue must be, for, our once thin ranks being swollen by many conquests, we were now a strong and terrible host.

“ Often enough, over our camp fires, we young ones would meet and speak of the thing among ourselves, foolishly enough as boys will, each boasting against his neighbour, and hazarding vain count of spoil and glory. One evening, being then within a march of the hunters' kraals, we were busy with just such empty talk when, suddenly, out of the midst of the bush that grew around us, a man appeared and walked within the circle of our fires. At once we knew that he must be of that strange people, for he was like no man that any of us had seen. His stature was noble ; his skin bright and

clear, but not pale like the white men's. His mouth was level; his eyes steady; his hands and feet small, like a woman's. The pelts of animals hung from his shoulders and about his middle. He carried no arms. In a moment we were round about him, and the man stood in the midst of us, defenceless, and called in a loud voice, in the Swahili tongue, saying 'How is it?'

"And we answered, 'It is war! for we are Angoni, and every man's hand is against us.'

"And he said, 'Yet the hands of my people are not against you. Pass in peace.'

"At that we laughed, deeming him afraid, and said, 'Let thy people come in then, and make submission, and render up their women and their ivory, their cattle and all that they have, and there shall be peace.'

"He laughed back at us as we spoke, but his eyes were like coals of fire.

"'Listen,' he said after a little. 'Rich gifts we will bring if such may content you, for we be men of peace; but submission we cannot make, for we be men of pride. Neither will we render up our women nor give our children into bondage, but will slay them rather with our hands. Choose, therefore, and speak, that we may know what manner of people ye be.'

"There was a sort of scorn in his voice as he said it that made us wroth to hear him, so that, for answer, one of us stepped forth and cast an assegai at the man, and it was a swift cast and true, but lo! he caught the flying spear and shook it in his right hand. 'So be it,' he cried, and broke the shaft upon his knee, and, as we ran to close upon him, leapt back into the darkness and was gone.

"When Zongindaba heard of it he thought awhile and said, 'These people will fight to the uttermost. Make ready therefore.'

"That same night we marched and attacked them, as

our custom was, in the half light that comes a little before true dawn. Ah, Teremani! the like of that battle was never fought on earth I think. We went into it in a high flush of pride, sure of victory, for we were as three to one, yet try how we would we could not pierce their line, no! nor gain a foot upon them anywhere. They fought us, those men of peace, even as we had fought the impis of Chaka, ay, and more fiercely yet! By noon their dead lay heaped on every side, cumbering the feet of the living; for every man upright two were down, yet still they held to it, though we rushed upon them till our ears sang to the din of our own battle cries, and the trodden earth beneath us ran blood at every stride.

"Some of us young ones who had looked for speedy victory, listed now to doubt the issue, having fought six hours in vain, and indeed, if the thing had endured a little longer, I know not but there were those among us who would have turned from it; for the strength of a man is his pride, and the weary know not shame. But as it drew towards evening, albeit such of our enemies as were yet alive withstood us not less stoutly than before, the greatness of our numbers began to overbear them at last, and I saw that the end was near. They saw it too, and, even as we broke through their outer line, those that were behind began to slay their wives and children.

"Teremani! it was wonderful! The women fled not away, neither made any outcry, but came and bowed their necks like heifers beneath the axe. Greatly did we desire to take some of them captive, for women such as those would have bred us heroes; but it was not to be. The killers moved swiftly, and those that were between made shift to hold us back till the work was done, so that before we could force a way, every woman was slain, and their babes with them; and we turned and cut down the last of the men."

The narrator drew a deep breath, as though awe-stricken by the memories he recalled.

"It was now darkening fast," he went on, "and we all spent with weariness, but there was looting to be done, and to it we turned. Cattle there were in plenty, but we had looked to find much stored ivory, yet search how we would we could come by none of it. Wandering with others on this quest I missed my comrades in the gloom and came back at last to find the field of battle quite empty, save for the dead and dying who lay upon it. As I strode over and among these bodies, making for our camp fires, there came suddenly a cry from the ground beneath me, and, stooping down, I saw, by the light of the moon, a lad, no older than myself, grievously wounded, who caught me by the foot, calling, 'Water! Bring me water and I will tell thee all!'

"At that I stopped, thinking I might hear something to profit.

"'If I give thee to drink, what hast thou to tell?' I asked him.

"'Ivory!' he whispered. 'A mountain of ivory for a cup of water!'

"He spoke thickly; his tongue was black with thirst.

"'Where?' I asked. 'Tell me first and I will go and return again, and if thou speakest truly, I will give thee to drink. But if thou liest, I will slay thee with my hand.'

"'Nay,' he groaned, 'how shall I wait upon thy coming and thy going? Seest thou not that I am like to perish? Give me water quickly or strike thy spear through my breast; I care not which it be.'

"There was a brook scarce fifty paces from us. The wounded youth could hear it as it ran. I saw that his strength was sinking fast, and, fearing he might die with his secret yet untold, I went and filled my gourd

at the stream's edge, and brought it to him. He drank greedily, and lay still awhile.

" 'Now tell me,' I said, and put the point of my assegai against his throat. He laughed in my face, and I saw that he wished nothing better than to be slain where he lay. I threw the weapon from me in a passion.

" 'I was a fool !' I said. 'Yet didst thou promise me.'

" At that he broke out like one distraught.

" 'Ay !' he exclaimed bitterly, 'weak and unworthy that I am, my foolish word is given and, though it was in mortal anguish that I gave it, I will redeem it now ; for that is the law above all laws, the first and the last.'

" He pointed stiffly with his hand. 'See,' said he, 'yonder twin hills.'

" I looked and saw two peaks, sharp and clear in the moonlight, a mile perhaps from where I stood, and they were alike both in bigness and shape, neither was the one higher than the other, but their tops ran slenderly to even points.

" 'Where the way narrows between them,' he said, 'there is a great rock set, and water running over it, and, behind the water, in the midst of the rock, a cleft scarce bigger than a man's body.'

" He stopped.

" 'Is that all ?' I said.

" 'It is enough,' he answered. 'Go ; and may God forsake thee also in the hour of death.'

" As he spoke those words he turned, with his face upon the ground, and a strange pity came upon me. The boy was very near to death, yet he would live a few hours still perhaps, and the foul hyenas find him. Another would have left him without a thought, yet, though he had cursed me, my heart was softened towards him, I know not why, and so I lifted my spear, balancing

it with care, and struck him cleanly between neck and shoulders. In an instant it was done, and he at peace.

"Thereafter I stood awhile, looking at the twin hills. They were full of shadows, with long edges of rock standing out from their flanks into the white light of the moon, like giant ribs I thought. To go alone to that place at such an hour seemed a fearful thing. Better, I told myself, to take counsel of my father, Zongindaba, that his wisdom might direct me. He was sleeping when I came to him, but, at the sound of my footsteps, leapt up at once, for he was a man who had lived much in alarms. I sat by the fire, and he with me, till my tale was told.

" 'Come !' he said, when I had ended. 'Let us go to this place now, while we may go privily.'

"So we took torches in our hands and fared out across the plain till we came to those two hills. Between them a valley narrowed as it ran upwards, till it became no more than a close gorge, and there truly, as the boy had said, was a great rock upright in the way, and water falling over it. Now this water came with force from the heights, and sprang outwards as it fell, so that we could creep beneath it, with our torches yet alight, and there surely, in the midst of the rock, was a hole, about the bigness of a man's body, or a little more, that seemed to be the mouth of some grot or inlet. By this then we passed, crouching, and thus entered presently into a cavern so great that we could not perceive its end. Teremani ! it was a fearful place, so that I felt as I had been swallowed alive into the earth's belly. When I dared to lift my eyes I saw that the walls were hewn with divers pictures of men, and dogs, and elephants, and among them a shape that was to us unknown, though I think it was the hunting god, Ar-Toth, for he was bent like a tracker. The floor of the cave in every part was heaped with ivory. It rose

high above our heads on all sides, with no more space between the stacks than would serve a man to walk. There were tusks newly cut, with the blood scarce dry on their butts, and old tusks that had lain there perhaps since the beginning of the world, or so I thought. For, Teremani, no beasts on earth at this present carry teeth like that. I have hunted from Zululand to Fipaland, and I know. There is ivory in that mountain such as no living eyes, save mine, have seen ; dark as the hide of a sable,* and thick as a man's middle. It's worth I know not, and indeed I think it is beyond measure ; but tell me this, Teremani, for one good tusk of these days how much coined money shall be paid ? ”

Tremenere reflected for a moment. The market price of ivory then was about ten shillings a pound.

“ Twenty, twenty-five, it may be thirty pieces of gold,” he answered.

The Zulu shrugged his shoulders. “ Then for each such tusk as I speak of a man might ask a hundred and fifty pieces,” he said.

By a piece of gold the Zulu meant a sovereign. A tusk worth a hundred and fifty pieces would therefore weigh three hundred pounds. Now the heaviest tusk then known to exist scaled a fraction over a hundred and ninety pounds, and had lately been exhibited in London as a curiosity.

“ The ivory lies there now to this day,” the old man went on. “ Ay ! for fear came upon us and we durst not lay hands on it.” He shuddered as he spoke. “ The cave was empty of living men, save only us two ; yet when either called to the other, the voice of a spirit answered on the instant, mocking him. Spirit eyes stared at us out of the shadows ; the sound of wings was heard, beating the air, and ah ! Teremani, once,

* The sable antelope.

twice, and again, came a cry that made the blood thicken in our pulses ! ”

Daunt bent his head to hide a smile, though his face was invisible in the darkness. To tell the Zulu that he had seen but the eyes of jackals and hyenas, and heard only the echoes of the cavern, and the wings and voices of the birds of night, would have served no purpose.

“ We were afraid,” Chenjovu went on. “ Even my father, Zongindaba, was afraid, and cried out that the presence of the god Ar-Toth moved in that place. So we turned, and made our way out from it as we had entered, and came again into the moonlight, bringing with us nothing from the cave, nor spoke of what we had seen to any man.”

He paused and, searching beneath the pile of hides on which he lay, drew forth a sort of parchment made from the dressed skin of some animal.

“ Hereon that place is shown,” he said, “ and signs whereby to find the way thither. The fire dies, my son. Feed it, that thine eyes may behold what is written.”

Daunt bent over the nearly extinct embers and raked them into flame, so that the hut was filled with light. Then, taking the parchment, he examined it attentively. It seemed to be a map or chart of some sort, but the unlettered lines had no significance for him. They were like a cypher of which he had not the key. The Zulu saw his bewilderment and beckoned him closer.

“ Look ! ” he said, touching an edge of the scroll ; “ here is the lake shore, thus and thus, and behind it the Angoni hills. Here are my kraals, and there, on the farther side, the fountains of the Namasa. Pass down that valley, so ”—his finger travelled as he spoke—“ this is the Inner Desert, and through it the path. But stray not thence, for beyond it is the Utter Desert, and it is trackless.”

In the light of these explanations the meaning of the

cryptic parchment began to unfold itself. Daunt took out his pocket-book and made some rapid notes, stopping now and then to ask a question. At last the moving finger reached a red spot near the centre of the map—all the rest of the design was in black.

"That is the place," the Zulu said slowly. "There are the Ivory Graves." And his extended hand dropped to his side.

Oddly enough, now that the tale was told and its jealous secret his, Daunt felt none of the elation that would have stirred most men in his place. The thought of his approaching return to England, in truth, so filled his mind at this time, that nothing unconnected with that prospect had power to move him greatly. He folded the parchment and buttoned it into his pocket with care, as befitted the key to so much wealth, but without asking himself more particularly what it might mean to him or how he was going to use it—that could wait. He was going home within forty-eight hours, and for the moment Africa and all it contained seemed not to matter much. Yet the old man's gift touched him strongly, the more so perhaps that it was what lawyers call *donatio mortis causa*—a thing bestowed in the knowledge that the giver must soon pass from all earthly possessions. He rose and stood by the couch.

"I know not why thou hast revealed this to me, father, rather than to another," he said musingly.

"I have done it because thou art dear to me above all men," the Zulu answered. "Ay! and I would have told thee long since but that I feared to send thee on a quest so perilous. But now I see clearly, and I fear no more."

His eyes had assumed the fixed abstracted gaze which Daunt had noticed in them once or twice before.

"Winged death shall pass thee by," he cried in a loud voice. "The arrow of the archer shall turn aside

from thy breast, belovèd as thou art. The lion and the leopard shall lie down before thee. Out of the pestilence thou shalt be delivered ; whole shalt thou pass through flood and flame. The craft of evil men shall not prevail against thee nor the powers of darkness undo thee. In danger is thy safety ; fearless shalt thou go therein ; for the armour that is upon thy shoulders is stronger than fine brass, and the shield before thy breast than triple iron."

A thrill passed through the listener's heart. In effect, and indeed, with a few variations, almost word for word, this old African had repeated to him the fateful prediction addressed to his ancestor by the Abbot of Locksbrook six hundred years before.

"What spirit moveth thee that thou speakest so ?" he asked.

Chenjovu made no answer. He seemed like a man utterly exhausted, so that Daunt bent over him at last in some anxiety. The thin old hands felt chill, but the pulse beat firmly. His breathing was deep and regular. But for his wide-open eyes he might have been asleep. The Englishman put some fresh wood on the fire, arranged the skins on which the Zulu lay, so as to cover him warmly, and stood looking at him for a while in some hesitation. Then, turning slowly, he went out from the hut, glancing at his watch as he did so. It was near two o'clock of a mild starry morning.

CHAPTER XII

MAKING THE BEST OF IT

WHETHER Brackenham's marriage was a success or not depends on your point of view. Old-fashioned people might shake their heads over it, but modern society expects less of matrimony than its forbears did, and in the estimation of the worldly the Brackenhams had little to complain of.

Marcia lived in Hill Street during the spring, part of the summer, and most of the winter, and Brackenham lived there when he happened to be in London, which was not quite so often. It had cost Marcia a good deal of trouble to establish things on this footing. At first Brackenham had been rather unreasonable, or so it had seemed to her. She was prepared to fulfil her part of the marital contract faithfully as she understood it; to spend her husband's money gracefully, to do the honours of his house as they should be done, and to give him—little as she liked that part of the routine—an heir to his large possessions. She was quite ready to be friends with him too; wished nothing better indeed. But Brackenham had shown plainly, during the first few months of their married life, that he wanted something more than this, and had exhibited a curious inability to understand that he was not going to get it.

Among other impossible aspirations he had wished to spend the greater part of every year among his

tenants at Bracy, and had seemed to think that Marcia would enjoy being shut up there alone with him, instead of merely going down to the place for a few weeks in the shooting and hunting seasons. In vain he had pleaded his duties as a rural landlord. What was the use, Marcia inquired, of paying an experienced agent to look after one's property if one meant to do his work for him?

That was the first occasion on which there had been an open avowal of divergent views—one cannot call it a conflict of wills, for as soon as Brackenham saw that his wife was in earnest he had given way, not without some inward disappointment, but good-humouredly enough, as his habit was, and had taken the house in Hill Street. Even that, however, had not sufficed to establish complete harmony. Brackenham was altogether out of his element in London, and Marcia knew it, and the knowledge irritated her. The life she led there was one he could never really share—but it was not that she minded. What annoyed her was rather that he persisted in trying to share it—"hung about" as she said to herself, instead of going, sometimes at any rate, his own way, and leaving her to go hers as other women's husbands did.

It was well for Brackenham's peace of mind that he never guessed how far apart they were; indeed, she did all she could to prevent him from guessing it, for she wished honestly to see him happy, provided he could be made so without unreasonable concessions. Besides, to be on bad terms with one's mate was stupid and uncomfortable, she thought, and did a woman no good. So she was at pains to be gracious, and if, at times, her irritation could not be disguised, she took care to retrieve such lapses as speedily as might be.

"Dear old boy," she would say, "was I horrid to you last night? I didn't mean to be. I was dreadfully

tired, you know, and when I'm tired I daresay I get snappish sometimes. But look here, Brack, I do wish you wouldn't think it necessary to stay up in town all through the season, just because I happen to be here. I'm very fond of you and you're very fond of me, but we can't spend our lives sitting face to face like a couple of heraldic griffins. I know you hate all this racket, so why not go away somewhere just for a while. I can see quite well you need a change and that worries me sometimes. You mustn't stay away too long though."

In the end Brackenham had given in as usual and had taken himself off a-fishing, and Marcia had watched him go with a sense of relief that was somehow not unmixed with other feelings.

"Curious how different men are," she said to herself. "Now if I had married Daunt he would never have done that. He hates this sort of life too, but he wouldn't have let me stay up here without him. He would have dragged me to the ends of the earth I know." A faint smile crossed her lips. "Well, as I don't in the least want to go to the ends of the earth, it's just as well I didn't marry him." She paused. "What fools girls are," she said aloud. "Godmother was right. It would have been dreadfully uncomfortable."

Meanwhile, in the intervals of catching spring salmon, honest Brackenham was thinking things out, as he would have called it. That his wife's heart was truly his he never doubted, therefore he was not unhappy. But he was puzzled. Hitherto he had envisaged matrimony from a point of view which evidently was not hers. There were already times it seemed when she preferred to be apart from him, albeit she was his wife—his loving wife—and they had only been married a few months. Somehow he had not expected that. Had he been too exacting then? Not made sufficient allowance for the natural instincts of a girl of two-and-twenty? After

all, was it reasonable to expect that her tastes and interests should run altogether parallel with his own—such a plain sort of fellow as he was? He remembered how he had wanted at first to keep her all to himself, in the flush of her youth and beauty, down at Bracy, where there was nothing for her to do; nobody to amuse her. That had been very selfish, really, if one came to think of it. True, he had given up the idea in the end and had taken the house in London to please her, but apparently he had been rather in the way in London, at times, and too stupid to realize it. Well what of it, now that he did realize it? It was nothing to be piqued about. After all, a vivacious young wife might be ever so devoted to a dull husband without wanting to have him perpetually at her side. In the country Brackenham could hold his own well enough. His accomplishments as a sportsman counted for something there. Besides, there were always people in the country who liked the same things that he did—ordinary sort of people with whom it was easy to get on. But in the aptitudes necessary to enable one to move in the gay society of cities, with satisfaction to oneself and entertainment to others, he knew that he was wretchedly deficient. No use ignoring that, he thought—at the same time, absurd to make too much of it. The cardinal fact in his life now was that Marcia loved him and had chosen him to be her mate, when she might have married almost any one she pleased. No need after that to worry about little superficial divergences of taste and habit. Yet since these divergences were there, it was better surely to admit them with frankness, and shape one's course accordingly. Marcia with her clearer vision had seen that from the first. It was he who had been short-sighted—inconsiderate. Married life was a complex affair of course, bound to be, calling for liberal readjustments of view and practice on both sides. Each must

surrender something for the other's sake. That stood to reason.

If Brackenham had been asked what his wife had surrendered for his own sake he would have felt astonished at such a question. She had surrendered herself; stooped to ally her grace with his homeliness, her brilliance with his simplicity, her long descended blood with his paltry Victorian nobility. And what, he would have asked, had he given her in return? The material advantages of wealth: furs, cars, diamonds, all that rubbish—why, any one of a score of men would have done as much for her and counted themselves blest. His love? Yes, indeed, but what was the use of loving a woman unless one tried to please her in other ways than by merely surfeiting her with things that cost nothing except money, and therefore meant nothing? A wife was entitled to look for something better than that. Tact, you know! Comprehension! Ah! how clumsy he had been. Henceforward he would try to make amends; show more readiness to meet her wishes; let her follow her own bent more. Of course, he must always protect her, but judiciously, mind—that was the point—without hanging about her—getting in her way. Modern wives hated that. Not, of course, that Marcia could be called modern in any but a perfectly harmless sense; still, she belonged to her generation, and the outlook of her sex had changed enormously in the last decade or two. One had got to remember that.

Thus philosophizing, Brackenham became conscious of a peculiar sense of mental clarification. He felt suddenly glad that he had come to Scotland. Here, in the hale, northern air, with the fleet river lapping the granite at his feet, he could think calmly and truly. The indefinable misgivings which had lately beset him, now at last coolly analysed, were seen to be but insubstantial shadows after all. Temperamental differences,

he told himself, existed between thousands of happily married couples. Such things had no real significance, unless by stupidly ignoring and running counter to them, one magnified their effect. Once their measure was taken, and good-humoured allowance made for them, they ceased to matter.

Happy Brackenham who could so persuade himself ! His spirits rose as he pursued these comfortable speculations, and their effect being fortified by satisfying sport and continuously fine weather, he ended by enjoying himself not a little, as he was obliged to confess on his return to London a few weeks later.

Marcia was breakfasting in her habit when he reached Hill Street after travelling all night.

"Why, of course you've enjoyed yourself !" she exclaimed, laughing. "I knew you would. Your wife understands you better than you understand yourself, you see. How nice you look in those tweeds, Brack ! But go and get out of them now, and come for a ride with me before the park fills. Make haste ! I'll tell them to saddle Grandee for you."

It began to be remarked, soon after this, that Lord and Lady Brackenham were not seen about together quite as much as they had been. True, the former was still in punctilious attendance on those not very frequent occasions when society seriously expects that a wife shall be escorted by her spouse ; but at other times—the times when, as Marcia said, "it didn't really matter"—he took to reading and smoking at home or at his club, while now and then he would go off to the country by himself for weeks together.

With his natural faculty for making the best of things, he accepted this new orientation contentedly enough. In time his rather slow moving mind learnt to understand with pathetic sureness just when Marcia wanted him

with her and when she would rather have him out of the way, so that she was never impatient with him now. I do not think she ever truly comprehended the rare selflessness of his nature, or appreciated how little reciprocity there was between the measure of his devotion and the measure of what she gave, or could give him, in return. Yet according to her lights she tried to be a good wife to him, and was in fact as good, I suppose, as any woman, not loving him, could have been. That she made him happy nobody could doubt who saw them together, but then that was easy for her ; his adoration so magnified and treasured every little careless tribute on her part. Her lightest half-contemptuous caress, her least word of praise, even her solicitude for his physical comfort, on such slight nourishment his grateful passion thrived.

There are natures to which that is possible, just as there are plants which can draw sustenance from the surface of a stone.

CHAPTER XIII

POUR LE BON MOTIF

ON just such a shining day as he had left Southampton three years before Daunt Tremenere returned to it. As his ship drew slowly to her moorings, and the scent of the coastal meadows blew across the bright water, it seemed to him that he had never understood till that moment all that England meant—how truly dear and desirable she was. The faces of the mixed crowd on the quay, gazing upwards at the decks of the incoming liner, looked strangely pleasant and benign he thought. Even the confused vista of docks and warehouses had now a compelling glamour for him. Behind that commonplace frontage his mind's eye could see already lush crofts and orchards, wheat fields, willowed brooks, placid villages set about with privet and blackthorn, and beyond these again the hurrying crowds and multitudinous lights of London.

There was nobody to meet him for he had returned unannounced, but before taking his seat in the boat express he dispatched a few telegrams, and among them one to Brackenham, who arrived hotfoot at Victoria almost as the train ran into the station.

"Why didn't you cable from Africa, Daunt?" he said; "I might have been out of town. As a matter of fact, I have been. I only came back yesterday, and

I didn't get your wire till a few minutes ago. However, your room will be ready by the time we get home."

"Thanks, Brack. It's more than kind of you and Marcia. I just wired to let you know I was here. I'll come round to-morrow and lunch or dine if I may; but I've got a bedroom at my club."

"At your club!" the other repeated, staring. "Well, you had better cancel it then. What nonsense, Daunt! You're coming to us of course."

Tremenere hesitated.

"If you don't mind, I think I won't, Brack—not just yet," he said, and then, seeing the disappointment in Brackenham's face, plunged offhand into excuses palpably absurd.

"I'm afraid I'm more at home in camps than drawing-rooms," he remarked, laughing. "I've got no decent clothes or anything. I've been three years in the bush, you see."

"Well, but you aren't there now," Brackenham retorted. "You're in London, and Savile Row is all before you. Besides, you look quite all right as you are. No, Daunt, really it won't do. If you were engaged to other friends I should have nothing to say, but I can't let you go straight to a club your first day at home."

He took his friend's arm as he spoke, and pushed him, without more ado, into the waiting car.

"I don't know what Daunt can have been thinking of," he said to his wife that night. "He positively tried to get out of coming here."

"Ah well! He's been away a long time," she said.

"Yes, but he isn't the sort to forget old friends."

"Had he made other arrangements then?" she asked.

"No. He was only going to his club."

She arched her brows, stifling a little yawn.

"To his club! Oh! Well, I'm glad you didn't let him do that."

In spite of the yawn Marcia lay awake deep into that night, a thing quite contrary to her healthy custom. Daunt's reluctance to come to Hill Street struck her as interesting.

"He was afraid to come," she said to herself. "Afraid because he's fond of me still. I could see that directly we met. Well, even if he is, it's not reciprocal, so there's no harm in it. I don't care a bit for him now, not in that way. Still, it is nice to have him back. I don't see why we shouldn't be friends."

She sighed. Lots of other wives incongruously mated had such companionships, "*pour le bon motif*," and so contrived to get a little happiness out of life without upsetting their own or any one else's peace of mind. She remembered how she had once discussed something of the sort with Edith Waveney, who had laughed and shaken her head, remarking that such platonic intimacies were extraordinarily difficult things to manage—much more so, Edith had opined, than actual love affairs, into which indeed they generally ended by transmuting themselves. But Marcia saw no reason why they should; at any rate, if they did it was the woman's fault she thought.

Next morning Daunt's plans were discussed. He had business which would keep him for a while in London, he explained, and hinted at the necessity of looking for furnished rooms as soon as might be.

Brackenham protested.

"There's no need to do that, Daunt, unless you're bored here," he observed. "We shan't be leaving town ourselves until the end of July. Speak to him, Marcia, and tell him to stay on with us."

"Why, of course," she said. "You'd much better. You shall be as free here as in your own club, Daunt, I promise you, and more comfortable than in rooms I hope. If there are any people you want to meet, just

tell me their names and they shall be asked to dine; and if you have any *bêtes noires* tell me too, and they shall not be asked. I can please myself in such matters, you see, and there are very few women who can do that. Most of them have to invite their guests with an eye to their husbands' interests, poor things. But Brack is different. He hasn't got any interests except me, have you, Brack?"

Her husband laughed. "She's quite right, Daunt," he said. "And you must look on this house as your own, old fellow, as long as you're in town. Come now! that's settled, eh?"

Thus hospitably entreated Daunt resigned himself to a situation which, in truth, he could hardly have avoided without sore vexation to his host; nor as time went on had he any cause to regret his acquiescence. That a woman such as Marcia should find her happiness with a man like Brackenham had seemed to him till then too much to hope for, knowing them both as he did, yet now, under the same roof with them, he could not doubt it. Just how Marcia succeeded in thus convincing him she herself could hardly have explained I think. Not certainly by trying to disguise the pleasure she took in his own society, still less by overtly "making up" to her husband as a cruder actress might have done. If anything, indeed, she paid less attention to Brackenham than usual, and yet Daunt had not been in the house a week when he told himself that the scruples he had felt about coming there were absurd.

That may have touched the jealous strain in his nature a little, but at any rate it relieved him of a certain embarrassment. If things were as they seemed to be between Marcia and her husband, and as he could no longer doubt they were, his presence in Hill Street could do no manner of harm. Satisfied on that point his days passed very pleasantly. The whole house was ordered

to his convenience. Marcia showed herself frankly *bonne camarade*. As for Brackenham, he was probably the happiest of the trio. It was uncommonly jolly having old Daunt there he thought—like old times almost—and did Marcia a lot of good too. She had never been in better spirits, and yet she did not go out as much as usual now, he noticed, and was often content to dine at home and go quietly to a play afterwards, or even just sit talking in the warm summer evenings. Yes, Daunt had an excellent influence over her—knew how to interest her without, apparently, making any special effort to do so; at any rate, without trying in the least to curry favour with her as so many men did. Why, he would speak to her quite severely at times when they chanced to disagree, and yet with a sort of gentleness too that was very disarming Brackenham thought.

July drew to an end and society began to “spread its sheeny vans for flight.” The Brackenhams were going to Scotland; Tremenere to one of his own farmhouses at Locksbrook.

“Pity we’ve got to break up like this,” Brackenham remarked. “It’s been so jolly having you here, Daunt. I’ve never been sorry to leave London before, I think. But, anyhow, you must come to us at Bracy later on. If this weather holds there will be a goodly show of partridges there in September.”

Tremenere made no rejoinder for a minute or two. The last month had been a very pleasant one for him, and yet—notwithstanding Marcia’s detachment, notwithstanding his own self-control, it would be better not to see too much of her perhaps.

“Thanks, Brack,” he said at last. “But I’m afraid I can’t make any promise about that. I’ve a good deal to do down at Locksbrook, one way and another, and my leave is limited, you see.”

Marcia looked up as he spoke.

"Your leave? You're going back then?" she asked.

"To Africa? Why, of course! I earn my living there," he answered laughing.

She did not second her husband's invitation, but in the smoking-room that evening Brackenham renewed it.

"Between ourselves," he explained, "I have a reason for wanting you to come to Bracy if you can. You see Marcia isn't very fond of the place, which is a pity, rather, because it's our home after all, and I ought to spend more time there than I do. It's dull for her, naturally, poor girl. I'm afraid she doesn't find our country neighbours very amusing, though I've always thought them nice enough people myself. But if you could come it would make all the difference. You two are such good friends, and if you could only induce her to stay on at Bracy for a bit, instead of just coming down for the covert shoots, she might get to like the place better."

"Come, Brack! none of your humbug!" Daunt said, laughing. "If your wife is to be reconciled to being a country mouse it's not my society that will do it, old chap, or any one else's, but your own."

Brackenham laughed in his turn, not without a touch of embarrassment. "Ah! that's just where you bachelors make a mistake," he remarked. "Marcia and I are the best of comrades certainly, but when you get married yourself, Daunt, you'll find that a wife can't do with her husband's undiluted society all day and every day, however devoted she may be. Besides, when I'm at Bracy I have to be out on estate work and so forth most of my time. That's where we have the pull over women, you see. They can't potter about a place and occupy themselves with all sorts of odd jobs as a man does. One has to take that into consideration."

"Why, you've become quite a philosopher, Brack."

"Well, one lives and learns I suppose. I know I didn't understand women a bit till I married. I don't believe any man ever does. That's why so many of us make mistakes at first. Why, I don't mind telling you now"—he paused and smiled as if recalling something absurd—"I don't mind telling you that when I married I quite expected Marcia to settle down at Bracy straight-away after our honeymoon, and sit there for the rest of her life—a girl like that you know—and give up all the innocent gaiety that means such a lot to women—so much more than we realize, Daunt. It shows how unconsciously selfish men are, doesn't it? Of course, I see now how unreasonable I was."

Daunt looked thoughtful. "Well, Brack," he remarked presently, "suppose we leave the Bracy visit open. I'll see about it. I can't say more at present."

He sat smoking for half an hour after his host had retired.

"What a dear old fellow it is," he said to himself at last as he rapped the ashes out of his pipe. "No wonder she's fond of him. He lets her have her own way too much of course. However, that was inevitable."

CHAPTER XIV

MR. BOLDERSON

MR. ROBERT BOLDERSON, now tenant of Locksbrook Abbey, was one of those coarse, capable, overpowering men who make their way through life Juggernaut fashion, as you may see a determined fellow butt through a crowd with his knees and elbows, his eyes fixed steadily to his own front. Everybody grumbles at a man like that, but in the end everybody gives way to him, and that is just what had happened in the case of Mr. Bolderson.

Whereabouts in the social scale he had begun his career nobody quite knew, and he was so rich now that hardly any one cared. The foundations of his fortune were understood to have been laid by successful dealings in mohair, a circumstance appropriately commemorated by the gilded goat which shared the field, in his new armorial bearings, with the azure and ermine of the Severnes, for he had married one of the many daughters of the impoverished earl of that name. But he had got far beyond the mohair stage by this time, being chairman of a dozen important concerns with interests stretching almost literally from China to Peru. Incidentally he sat in the House of Commons for the Piepowder division of Westport, owned a highly successful racing stable, and had lately refused a baronetcy with

all the assurance of a man who has promised himself a peerage and means to get it.

Like most persons of ultra-sanguine temperament, Bolderson was good-natured enough in his bouncing way, and he had no sooner learnt of Daunt's arrival at Willow Farm, which was only just across the park, than he strolled over there to offer hospitality to his landlord.

"Queer sort of a little dog-hole this," he remarked agreeably, casting a curious glance round the diminutive parlour. "Good enough for a week end, perhaps, but you'll be here some time I expect. Look here! better come straight along with me to the Abbey, Tremenere, what? I'll send a man down to pack your traps."

Now it happened that Daunt was not in the best of humours that morning. It was his first visit to the estate since the Abbey had been let, and the sense of dispossession was sore upon him. Bolderson's florid countenance, Bolderson's aggressive tweeds, Bolderson's loud, confident voice, annoyed him. To be reminded by Bolderson's rather patronizing invitation that his house was no longer his home annoyed him still more. What the devil did the fellow mean by bursting in upon him in this way? Still, it was well meant perhaps. No need to be rude to the man. He checked the curt refusal that had almost escaped him.

"It's really very kind of you," he said presently, "but, you see, my movements are rather uncertain. I don't quite know how long I shall be here, and I've only just settled down in this cottage. I think, if you don't mind, I'd better stay where I am."

Bolderson waved a careless hand as though to intimate that there was no accounting for tastes.

"Please yourself of course," he said. "I can't do more than ask you. But look here! come up to lunch anyway, and meet her ladyship; daughter of old

Severne you know. I'd like to show you round the place. It's been improved a lot since you saw it last I can tell you."

Daunt bit his lip. The idea of "improvements" at Locksbrook filled him with misgiving. What sort of improvements would be likely to commend themselves to a man like Bolderson?

"He's been playing Old Harry with the place probably," he said to himself. "I wish to goodness Anstiss had put a clause in the lease to restrain him. I ought to have thought of it myself I suppose; but who could have expected a fellow like this?"

However, his apprehensions on the subject decided him to accept the invitation to lunch, since it offered an opportunity of seeing for himself what his tenant had been doing, and presently the two men set off together.

As they approached the house Daunt noticed, at every step, the beautiful condition of the park and grounds. It had not been possible indeed to remove all traces of the dilapidation wrought by his father's selfish neglect, but neither care nor money, evidently, had been spared to that end, and he was forced to admit to himself with growing astonishment, not untouched by a sort of jealousy, that what had been done was in admirable taste. Decay had been checked, waste repaired, order re-established, but apart from that the place was still the same. It had been patiently and skilfully restored—not cut up, remodelled, and spoilt as he had feared. From time to time he stood to review more fully some well remembered vista. The steady autumn sunlight touched every detail of the scene to living beauty; the soft lawns, the high dark topiary hedges, broad drives, and shining water spaces, the flush of late roses on grey terraces, russet and amber of oak and beech behind the pleached fencing of the coverts, the crimsoning leafage of ancient pear trees in the walled orchard, and beyond

these again the great front of the abbey itself, with its high-pitched, massive roofs, its deeply mullioned windows, and the noble simplicity of the long vertical tracery lines so characteristic of its period.

Bolderson noticed his guest's abstraction, not without complacency.

"Looks well the old place, doesn't it?" he remarked, with an easy proprietary air, for which Daunt felt as if he could have throttled him where he stood.

"It looks itself," he answered coldly.

"H'm! if so, that's a damned sight more than it did when we came here," the other retorted, a little nettled. "It's cost me a pretty penny tidying it up, I can tell you."

Tremenere controlled his temper with an effort. After all, there was truth in what Bolderson said.

"I can see that," he answered quietly. "I know what an expensive place it is to keep up, and what a bad state of repair it was in when I let it. You've done wonders with it. Don't think I fail to appreciate that."

What he did fail to appreciate was how it came about that a man like this should care enough about such things to understand them. But Bolderson's next remark enlightened him.

"I don't mind telling you that I should have altered the whole plan of these grounds if it had been my job," he said. "All right in their way, perhaps, but I find them a bit old-fashioned myself. However, her Ladyship likes 'em as they are, and I leave all that sort of thing to her. It's not worth bothering about anyhow."

Daunt registered a silent vote of thanks to the protectress of his property. "I might have guessed as much," he thought.

"Your people have been here five or six hundred years, haven't they?" Bolderson went on; "and now you haven't got the dibs to live in the place yourself,

eh? Well, by Jove, it's the same thing everywhere. I don't want to boast, Tremenere, but if it wasn't for men like myself most of these great forty and fifty room country houses would have to be pulled down soon, or turned into hotels or something. No offence to you personally, but the fact is, though I'm a Conservative and all that, I really haven't much patience with your old squirearchy lot sometimes. They're always grouching about high taxation and so on, most of them, instead of bucking up and helping themselves. Why, there's more money to be made now than ever if a man only uses his wits. Look at me! I began with twopence halfpenny, and I could button up half the old families in this county into my breeches pocket now, and leave room for some loose change too."

Daunt laughed. The man was insufferable, he thought, but there was that about him which made him somehow significant.

Conversing in the same agreeable strain, Bolderson presently ushered his companion into the great hall of the Abbey where a considerable party was assembled—Lady Constance Bolderson, Mr. Augustus Bolderson, Mr. Reginald Bolderson, the Misses Gladys and Susan Bolderson, with a covey of guests. Lady Constance was a woman of forty-five or thereby, still handsome in a large, faded style. Her marriage had been frankly a contract of convenience on both sides, but she was one of those women whom use will accustom to anything, and her life with Robert Bolderson was not without compensations of a sort. Within certain limits, which she had discovered by painful experiment long ago, her husband generally let her have her own way. They were narrow limits it is true, but in that respect they corresponded with her aspirations. Moreover, her lethargic nature could not but acknowledge and respect the man's uncommon strength of character. People

who laughed at Robert, she noticed, took care to do it behind his back. He might be coarse and unpolished, but when it came to a question of affairs, anything that really mattered, he always seemed able to bend men and circumstances to his will. Lord Severne and her brothers went hat in hand to him. Celebrated people, whose names one saw in the papers every day, were glad enough to seek his advice. As for the smaller fry, society men and women with little axes of all sorts to grind, they were for ever writing to Lady Constance, intriguing for introductions to him.

Lady Constance had never met Daunt Tremenere, but she had heard all about him of course, and felt a good deal of sympathy for the victim of so much misfortune. It was a sad tale she thought, the more so since the young man's difficulties were not of his own making. He was quite nice very likely. She hoped he would get on with Robert, who might then put him in the way of mending his fortunes perhaps. Robert was so clever about things like that, and good-natured too, sometimes, if he happened to take a fancy to any one.

As the two men entered the hall there was a slight but general stir among the house party. Every one felt curious to see the ruined owner of Locksbrook. Lady Constance in particular regarded him attentively. Somehow she had expected quite a young man, debonair, all anxiety to please, perhaps even a little nervous. Instead, she beheld one who seemed not less than five-and-thirty, lean and strong of feature, with clear, sombre eyes, and a complexion so deeply tanned that his close brown moustache showed nearly blonde against it. Rather a nice-looking man Lady Constance thought, but not at all the type she had anticipated; not the sort probably whom it would be easy to help, or who would care very much what impression he made on the all powerful Robert.

As lunch proceeded this became rather awkwardly evident. Though not precisely an intemperate man, Bolderson was accustomed to "do himself well" at table, with the result that he was always more expansive there than at other times—a great chance of course for such as had private reasons for wishing to humour him. Daunt, who had none, tried nevertheless to be reasonably civil; but Bolderson had about as much tact as a rhinoceros. Possibly he did not mean to be offensive—he often said it was surprising how touchy some people were—but it was unfortunate, certainly, in his then mood, that he should have chosen to revert to the subject of what he had done for Locksbrook, its "shocking" condition when he first came there, and the trouble and expense it had cost him to put it in order.

"Well, it's beautiful now, that's all I can say," someone remarked soothingly. "Quite beautiful, Mr. Bolderson."

"Ah! very likely; that only shows what can be done if a man takes enough trouble and spends enough money. But you should have seen the place four years ago! You'd hardly believe it was the same now. I almost wonder sometimes whether it's been worth while. I could have had my pick of a dozen up-to-date places with nothing to do but walk into them, but there's something about this old abbey—I don't know what to call it; old-world, if you understand what I mean—that took my fancy from the first. I said so to Connie directly we saw it. Another man might have been put off, everything was in such a state. Our friend here will admit that, I'm sure." He jerked his thumb at Daunt as he spoke. "But I always know my mind. There's nothing wrong with the place that money won't put right, I said. Those were my words if I remember, and I think I've made 'em good."

Daunt swallowed his rage with an effort. To sit under

his own roof and hear the home he loved thus patronized by a stranger before strangers, as if its immemorial dignity and beauty were the creation of this man's purse, was almost more than he could stand. Lady Constance, watching him uneasily, saw his eyes harden, saw him turn away and occupy himself with the neighbour on his other side. Being a kindly and a well-bred woman she had no difficulty in divining what he felt. But Bolderson could not understand it. He grew annoyed in his turn, and, when Bolderson was annoyed, there was no mistake about it. Nevertheless, he insisted, after luncheon, on taking his landlord and some of the house-party on a tour of inspection "to show them the improvements." The new garage, the rose terraces, the additional hothouses, the enlarged kennels, everything had to be exhibited and appraised, so that it was not until late in the afternoon that Daunt got away.

"Queer sort of a chap that," Bolderson remarked as soon as he had departed. "What do you make of him, Connie?"

"Ah! poor fellow," she said.

"Poor fellow be hanged!" her husband broke out irritably. "Hardly civil, I call him."

"I know what you mean," Lady Constance responded. "But well—I saw what was at the back of his mind all the time. That man is as proud as Lucifer, Robert. Didn't you notice the look on his face when you were showing him the rose terraces? He was as jealous as could be—I saw it at once. He can't bear the idea of strangers touching his home even to improve it. It's unreasonable of course, but somehow I can understand that feeling."

"Can you, Connie? well, I can't; that's flat. There's no pleasing some people apparently. If I'd left the place knee deep in weeds as I found it, do you suppose

he'd have thanked me? Instead of that I've spent half a fortune putting everything in order, and I pay Tremenere a thumping rent on top of it all. I don't see what the stiff-necked beggar has to complain of, I'm sure."

Meanwhile Daunt was walking slowly back to Willow Farm in a mood of high vexation; angry with himself for being angry with Bolderson. The man could not help being a bounder, and what did it matter if he was? He had shown himself a good tenant; few would have done as much for the place. Yet somehow the more Daunt thought of him and his handiwork the more he resented them. Lady Constance had divined his state of mind quite accurately. The thought of Locksbrook in the hands of strangers had always been hateful to him, but just how hateful he had not realized till now. For him this house, which had sheltered fifteen generations of his race, had never been or could be, a mere pile of masonry, a place to eat and sleep in. In his heart he felt towards it almost as towards a thing sentient, as if its great frame were instinct with some sort of dim and patient life. Well might its stones cry out, he thought, against the indignities that had been put upon it; against his father, who had neglected and stripped it; against himself, who had turned it over to the dominion of strangers, to the patronage of such a man as Bolderson!

In a sense, of course, he was not to blame. It was not his fault that three hundred thousand pounds of debt stood between him and his home; but what of that? what did it matter whose fault it was? He had been the first Tremenere to abandon Locksbrook; his own hand had delivered it into bondage; its humiliation was his own, and it must be his to redeem it, if its redemption could be compassed.

CHAPTER XV

MARCIA SPOILS IT ALL

THAT evening, for the first time since his return from Africa, Daunt took Chenjovu's parchment from the dispatch box where it had lain for five months, and placing a large scale survey map beside it, compared the two attentively.

"Yes," he said at last, sitting back in his chair. "It is quite clear; I can find the place all right, and Chenjovu never lied to me: the ivory is there. The only question is whether there is enough of it."

He lit a pipe and began to smoke thoughtfully. What he had now in mind was no ordinary speculation. His tastes were simple, and money in itself meant little to him, so that the prospect merely of a transaction more or less profitable hardly tempted him at all. To seek out this cache where it lay would take far more time than he could command within the remnant of his leave; before he could attempt it he must resign his appointment in Namasiland, and the thought of doing that gave him serious pause. His work at Fort Felix held him strongly; to give it up for anything that promised less than the liberation of his home seemed not worth while, yet to effect so much he must count on an immense treasure. Picking up a pencil he calculated roughly the equivalent of the Locksbrook mortgages in terms of ivory; the figures seemed prepos-

terous. Could he reckon on such a hoard? No doubt there was a lot of ivory there; Chenjovu had said as much, but in the mouth of an African native that might mean anything, for native language has no terms in which to express quantities or values in any but the vaguest way. And yet somehow the Zulu's words, and not his words only but the inflection of his voice, a certain earnestness in all his demeanour, had seemed to indicate that he spoke of something phenomenal; something that was indefinite only because incalculable. What was it the old man had said?

"The floor of the cave in every part was heaped with ivory. It rose high above our heads on all sides, with no more space between the stacks than would serve a man to walk. There were tusks newly cut, with the blood scarce dry on their butts, and old tusks that had lain there perhaps since the beginning of the world. . . . Teremani, no beasts that dwell on earth at this present carry teeth like that. I have hunted from Zululand to Fipaland and I know. There are tusks in that mountain such as no living eyes save mine have seen."

Daunt wondered to recall the words so certainly. Till that moment he had scarcely given them a thought since they were uttered, yet now, so winged with conviction they came, so clearly shaped on his memory, it seemed almost as if he heard again the Zulu's living voice. Yes! if his home was indeed to be redeemed there lay the way of its deliverance, traced on the chart before him—he could doubt it no more. He would have to give up his commission of course, alter all his plans, but what of that? He thought of Bolderson and frowned. Slowly he folded the precious parchment, locked it away again, and filled a fresh pipe with a mind at ease, for his resolution was taken. The sooner he started the better. It was now mid-August. There was a good deal that must be attended to before he could

leave England, but it would be possible to sail towards the end of September at latest.

The first thing to be done was to send in his resignation, and he wrote it out that evening, only to tear the letter up next day. The step he was taking seemed to call for some explanation and he was unwilling to give any, in which circumstances the Colonial Office might choose to make a fuss about it. Indeed he was uncomfortably aware that they had it in their power to refuse his resignation point-blank, so that, on reflection, it seemed better to call on the Under-Secretary of State personally. He knew that Sir Henry had been his mother's neighbour and friend in her girlhood, which might help him a little ; at any rate it would suffice to recall his name to the great man's memory. Betaking himself to Downing Street accordingly, he sent in his card and, after waiting for an hour and a half, was ushered at last into a big bare office, where a tired-looking old gentleman with a thin intelligent face sat alone at a desk heaped with papers.

As Daunt entered the Under-Secretary glanced at the card before him, and thence at his visitor's face.

"So you are Mary Tremenere's son, eh?" he said. "Mary Daunt when I knew her. Dear me! why, we were playmates before I was breeched." He paused. "Well, we had better get to business. What can I do for you?"

Daunt explained, much, as it seemed, to Sir Henry's astonishment.

"I don't understand it," he exclaimed, a little irritably. "Have you thought what you are doing? You speak of urgent private reasons, but you don't tell me what they are. Besides, this sort of thing plays the devil with official arrangements. You young men never seem to consider that. Now listen to me. I have had very good reports of your work in Namasiland. It

seems that you have remarkable influence with the Angoni, and that means a great deal to the Government, for the Angoni are troublesome folk. Nobody has been able to do anything with them hitherto. So you see we can't very well spare you, Tremenere."

Daunt shook his head. "If you don't mind my saying so I think you are mistaken there, sir," he answered coolly. "If it were so—if my services were really indispensable I wouldn't press my resignation. I am a soldier, and I understand what duty means; but the Angoni are perfectly quiet now. There will be no more trouble with them."

The Under-Secretary raised his eyebrows.

"You speak confidently," he said.

"I speak of what I know, sir," Daunt answered. "Besides, I have their word for it."

The old man smiled.

"You think that is a doubtful bond perhaps," the other went on. "But I have lived among these people and I am sure of what I tell you. Any one can handle them now who treats them fairly."

Sir Henry looked thoughtful. Tremenere impressed him rather.

"I hope you are right," he said, after a little. "But even if you are, have you reflected what it would mean to yourself to give up your career like this? Frankly, I think it would be to your advantage to stick to the service, Tremenere. Promotion may be rather slow just now, but you are young—and we don't forget good men."

"Thank you, sir," Daunt answered. "I don't pretend that I have no regrets. But I haven't decided without counting the cost."

The Under-Secretary looked at him curiously. "I wonder what he is up to," he thought. "I've a notion it's something big."

He rose and paced the room slowly for a few minutes, his hands under his coat tails.

"It's all very irregular," he said at last, "resigning at a moment's notice like this. It's not in the public interest, and I'm not sure that it's in your own. However, I can see that you have something else in view and you are evidently not a fool, so go ahead. You shall have your formal release in a day or two. No, you needn't thank me. Good-bye."

He put out his hand as he spoke. "Come and see me again some day," he added, as he turned to his desk. "I am always here."

During the weeks that followed Daunt set himself to work out his arrangements in detail, and had nearly completed them when, early in September, the Brackenhams arrived at Bracy. For the first time in her life Marcia felt glad to be there. The house parties in Scotland had been everything that house parties should be, yet somehow she had not enjoyed them as usual, and had had a curious sense of being out of touch with her fellow-guests. Some of the women had noticed her abstraction and had teased her about it, and, instead of returning their chaff with her customary gaiety, she had received it with unwonted irritation.

"There is something the matter there," Lady Waveney had said, after her departure. "I wonder what it is. She can't be ill; there isn't a healthier woman in England. She can't be in debt; Brackenhams is too rich. Perhaps she is in love. If so, it is going to be interesting."

"Do you think so?" her companion remarked. "I should say Marcia was a very cautious young woman, myself."

"Perhaps," Edith Waveney answered. "But the women who are afraid of dipping their toes into Rubicon

are just the sort to end by losing their balance and toppling in with a resounding splash. I've often noticed that. It's the paddlers like you and I, Kitty, who are really the cautious ones. We may get our skirts wet sometimes, but we keep inside our depth."

Within another week Daunt's preparations were so far advanced that he had little to do beyond packing his traps, and was just beginning to feel a little bored with his forced inactivity when an invitation arrived from Bracy, which, in the circumstances, he was glad enough to accept. Since he was going abroad so soon there could be no harm in seeing Marcia again—besides, he was bound to say good-bye to them. So he dispatched a note the same evening, following it himself next day.

"I've lost no time in coming, you see," he remarked to his host, "but the fact is, I'm leaving England in a fortnight."

The welcoming grin faded from Brackenham's face.

"In a fortnight!" he exclaimed. "Why, I thought your leave wasn't up for two months yet!"

"Well, no; it isn't. But there are reasons. I'll tell you all about it presently."

After dinner, that evening, he made his promise good.

"By Jove!" Brackenham said, when the tale was told. "What a fellow you are, Daunt! Do you mean to say you've been sitting on such a secret all this time without doing anything about it? Why, it's just like *Treasure Island* in the story books. I hardly thought such things could be in these days." His face flushed as he spoke, like a boy's. "Daunt, what perverse creatures we humans are, aren't we?" he went on. "Here am I with everything a man can want almost—the sweetest wife in the world, and heaps of friends, and more money than I know what to do with, and yet

—I'd give ten years of my life to be in a thing like that."

Daunt walked across to where the other was sitting.

"Look here then, Brack," he said, "why shouldn't you be in it, after all? It will take two to work this expedition properly and you're just the sort of man I want, except for local experience; but you'd soon pick that up. I wonder I didn't think of it before."

Brackenham jumped to his feet. "Do you really mean it?" he asked eagerly. "There is nothing in the world I should like better. But wait a minute. I mustn't rush at the thing. How long would it take? I have to think of Marcia, you see."

Daunt began ticking off his fingers.

"Well, say six weeks at the outside from England to our base, a fortnight there to look round and collect porters and so on, and another month to our destination. That makes three months outward, doesn't it? Of course, I don't know exactly what may happen when we get there, but assuming that everything goes as I hope, we ought to find the place without much difficulty. After that it will simply be a question of arranging transport for the ivory, and you could leave all that to me and go back by yourself. So six or seven months should see you home again."

"Oh! then I think I can manage it," Brackenham exclaimed eagerly. "I shouldn't care to go unless Marcia agreed, naturally, but I'm sure she will if it's no longer than that. Six months isn't such a great deal once in a way, and this is the chance of a lifetime for me."

"Very well," Daunt said. "I've fixed everything up, so you have nothing to do but pack and book your passage. The *Wardour Castle* is our boat. It's the 16th to-day, and she sails on the 27th, remember."

"All right. I'll telegraph for a berth. And now, I

think we had better turn in. There's a partridge drive to-morrow, you know, and I want to start early. I'll tell Marcia later on. No use disturbing her to-night."

But, as he entered his dressing-room, his wife called to him.

"Come in, Brack," she said. "I want to speak to you."

She dismissed her maid and, sitting at the dressing-table, began to brush out her thick fair hair.

"What have you two men been plotting downstairs?" she inquired, without turning round. Brackenhams started.

"How guilty you look," she exclaimed, laughing. "I can see your face in the glass, you know."

"Well, I was going to tell you to-morrow anyhow——"

"Oh no! You are going to tell me now. I felt sure something was being hatched. What is it?"

He pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Would you mind my going away for six months or so, dear? Away from England, I mean. I should be back by April."

She moved a little so as to face him. "That depends," she said. "Tell me all about it. I can't say anything till I know the details."

When she had heard them she sat for a while without speaking, her face suddenly clouded.

"It sounds to me like a wild goose chase," she said at last, pettishly. "I don't believe in these absurd tales. You ought not to encourage Daunt in such folly."

"I think it's all right, really," he urged. "Daunt wouldn't undertake a thing like this without being sure of his ground. You know what a level-headed fellow he is."

"I know he is the most self-willed man alive," she cried. "But what do my feelings or wishes matter. I

can't stop either of you, I suppose, if you are determined to go."

Brackenham looked distressed. "Why do you say that, Marcia?" he protested. "I confess I want to go. I shall never have such a chance again. But if it would make you unhappy, dear, I won't give it another thought."

He bent as if to kiss her, but she drew away from him.

"I think you're a bit tired, my sweet, aren't you?" he said. "Don't let us discuss this any more to-night."

As he left the room her eyes followed him with an inscrutable look. "Poor old boy," she said to herself. "Why is he so good to me? And why can't I feel anything for him but esteem and gratitude and a lot of dull emotions like that—if one can call such things emotions."

She switched off the electric lamp and, folding her dressing-gown about her, sat gazing into the fire. Slowly on her troubled fancy rose the vision of the African wilderness, that land of mystery and dread, that siren whose call it seemed men could not resist. Why should it be? What was there in that hateful country that it should have power to draw them so, away from the women who loved them? It was cruel what Daunt was doing. It was not fair of him to come into her life again and disappear so recklessly, into unknown dangers, without a thought for her, without saying a word about it till the very last moment. But that was just like him. He was so secretive and obstinate; so different from Brackenham, who always told her everything, always did as she wished.

Next day the house filled with shooting guests, and it was not till they dispersed three days later that she could find an opportunity of speaking to Daunt alone. He too was to leave Bracy next morning. He was

reading in the library, but rose as she entered, and put his book aside.

"So you are going to-morrow," she said.

"I'm afraid so. I can't thank you enough for all your kindness to me, Marcia, both here and in Hill Street."

The formality of the words piqued her a little.

"Surely there is no need for you to say that sort of thing to me, Daunt," she protested. "If you really value kindness from me, why are you putting yourself beyond reach of it?"

"You mean why am I going back to Africa? I thought Brackenham had explained that."

"Well, yes, but tell me, Daunt," she said timidly.

"This expedition—is it going to be dangerous?"

He had taken up his pipe and was filling it slowly. He did not notice how her face had paled.

"Dangerous? Oh! I don't think so," he answered.

"Ah! but how carelessly you say that!"

He laughed. "Well, I suppose there is some element of risk in everything. A brick might fall on one's head in Piccadilly, for the matter of that."

The flippancy of his tone, intended to reassure her, missed its mark.

"Ah! of course," she cried, with sudden passion.

"I might have known that whenever anything really important is at stake, a woman is always put off and treated like a child. It isn't fair."

He laid down his pipe and looked at her in surprise.

"Why, Marcia, how can you say so? You know as much about this business as I know myself pretty nearly. You've been told everything. You and Brack are the only people besides myself who are in it."

"Oh yes. I've been told about the ivory and all that, I daresay," she exclaimed, with rising bitterness.

"What then? Do you suppose I care about your horrid old ivory? I wish it wasn't there. I don't

believe it is. Daunt, how hard you are! Can't you understand that a woman may have some sort of a heart? Here are you and my husband going off to the ends of the earth, running into Heaven knows what dangers, and you don't seem to think it means anything to me."

Her voice began to falter; her eyes grew bright with helpless tears.

"Poor girl," he thought. "How fond she must be of him! That sort of thing always shows with women when it comes to a pinch like this."

He came and stood beside her. "Marcia, dear," he said gently, "forgive me if I seemed to be indifferent. It is not so. I understand how you feel and I'm not hiding anything from you. Of course, one can never be quite sure what may happen in a country like Africa, but honestly I don't anticipate any more risk than if we were going on an ordinary hunting trip."

"Ah! Daunt. It doesn't sound to me like an ordinary trip at all. I'm frightened. I feel as if something dreadful would come of it."

"We shall take good care of ourselves," he assured her. "It will only be for a few months."

But the distress and fear in her eyes remained. She put her little hand on the sleeve of his coat.

"Daunt, must you really go? Won't you reconsider it?"

He was silent.

"For my sake, if I beg you," she said earnestly.

He turned from her and going across to one of the bays stood there a while looking out into the September sunlight.

"It's all for him," he thought. "If he was not mixed up in it she wouldn't care; she wouldn't look like that. Damn it! Why should Brackenham have everything?"

He flushed to the temples at that conscious disloyalty and, turning presently, went back to her side.

"Listen, Marcia," he said. "You shall not be troubled any more. I'm afraid I've been rather selfish about this, but I see plainly now that you can't bear the thought of letting Brackenham go. Well, make your mind easy. He shall stay with you."

"You mean—you will go alone."

He nodded. "Ah! you don't understand," she exclaimed, in sudden desperation. He looked at her steadfastly.

"What is it, then? Come! you must trust me, Marcia."

She hesitated no longer. There was no other way. She lifted her clear eyes to his.

"I do trust you. I love you," she said.

Whatever Daunt Tremenere's failings may have been, a defective sense of honour was assuredly not one of them; but whose wife soever this woman might be, she was the woman he loved, and had loved long before she had been a wife at all, and her avowal took him unready. Some moments passed before he put her from his arms. They stood facing each other and so remained, without speaking, for a long time it seemed. Outside a thrush sang loudly in the lilacs under the open bay. Its clear voice made the stillness of the great room seem infinite.

"I must say something," was the thought that kept running through Daunt's mind. "I must say something. My God! What can I say?" But it was Marcia who spoke first.

"I had to tell you. I tried not to. Oh Daunt! What are we to do? Listen!" she went on quickly. "I'm not a silly ignorant girl any more. Marriage never leaves any woman quite the same; not even a

marriage like mine. I know what life means at last. I ought not to have married Brack, poor dear old fellow, but it was my godmother's doing. You must have guessed that, Daunt, surely. Oh! I was weak and cowardly I daresay. Lots of girls are like that. You don't know how helpless they are. It was only half my fault, and I've had to bear all the punishment. I've tried to make the best of it, indeed I have. I've tried to be a good wife to him, but I can't go on—I can't. I'm only twenty-five and in ten years my youth will be gone. Life is such a short affair, don't let us waste any more of it, you and I."

He did not answer her. His eyes were on the ground. The shadow of an intolerable doubt passed through her mind.

"What is it?" she cried suddenly, a hint of imperiousness in her voice. "Surely I have not asked in vain! Look at me, Daunt! Speak to me! Don't you love me still?"

As she moved towards him he caught her hands in his as if he had been drowning.

"By my God I love you more than life or death," he said. "But it cannot be. It mustn't be. Marcia! Help me! It's more than a man's meant to bear."

He hardly knew what he was saying, and yet it was the best thing perhaps that he could have said. The strange appeal from his strength to her weakness moved her as at that moment nothing else could have moved her. To see him so disarmed, turning to her for countenance, shocked her; to know that it was herself who had brought him to that pass filled her with an immeasurable contrition. Marcia Brackenham had spoken truly when she said that she was no longer what Marcia Hessenden had been. Her womanhood understood what girlhood can never understand. For once, before his manifest distress, all thought of herself was forgotten.

The feminine instinct of protection, the beautiful quasi-maternal longing to shield and solace that lies deep in the nature of all women, good or bad, and makes their love a thing sublime, rose like a flood in her heart.

She disengaged her hands and touched him gently on the shoulder.

"Daunt—I can't bear to see you like this," she said. "Be comforted, dear. I will help you; indeed I will. Only tell me what you wish—what you think we should do."

As she spoke his momentary weakness seemed to pass, and when presently he answered her his voice sounded firm and level again.

"There are two courses before us, Marcia," he said. "Either I take you from your husband, or we must part utterly, here and now. There is no middle way."

"I know," she answered.

"If it was any one else in the world than Brackenhams I couldn't leave you after what you've told me. But it isn't any one else. There's the irony of it. It is just Brack. You know what he and I have been to each other all our lives. He trusts me; I'm under his roof, Marcia. But that isn't all. You see, he's not like most other men. He has no armour against a stroke like that. If he lost you, and lost you through me, it wouldn't just hurt his vanity or make him unhappy for a few months. It would destroy him as surely as if I killed him with my hand. Ah! I hate talking like this. It comes badly from me, I know, when it's been my fault all through."

She shook her head.

"Yes," he went on, in poignant self-reproach. "I ought never to have gone to Hill Street. I ought not to have come here."

"Daunt, you couldn't help it," she protested. "I made you come. I made you think I didn't care. I

almost thought I didn't myself at first. I thought we could just be friends, and now I've spoilt it all."

"No," he answered. "It's going to make things very difficult for us, dear, what you've told me; but I wouldn't have it unsaid."

"It's going to make things impossible," she said miserably. "I only told you because I wanted to keep you from Africa, and now you'll have to go just because I did tell you. That's what I meant when I said I had spoilt everything."

"I should have had to go in any case," he said, trying to reassure her.

"Perhaps. But I shouldn't have lost you altogether. We could have written to each other; and when you came back I should have seen you sometimes—and now, I suppose, we mustn't have anything to do with each other at all."

He saw that her self-control was weakening and feared for his own.

"Marcia, it's no use. Don't torment yourself, my sweet. I mustn't stay here any longer." He paused. "It will make things easier for you now perhaps if Brackenham comes with me."

She nodded, and silence fell between them again. He moved towards the door.

"Ah! Not like that!" she exclaimed piteously. "I shan't see you alone again. Don't leave me so."

He came slowly back to her side.

"Do you realize what this is going to mean for me?" she asked. "It will be hard for you too I daresay, but you'll be out there in the midst of action and adventure and I shall just have to stay at home and stick it out. It's always like that; always the woman who pays. Be tender with me then, just for this last."

She came close to him as she spoke and lifted her flower-like face. It will only make things harder for

both of us he thought, but flesh and blood could not deny her then.

As he bent and kissed her he felt all her body tremble against his own and her tears upon his cheek, but she made no effort to detain him. Indeed it was she who broke from his arms at last, strongly as he held her.

"Go now. God bless you. Go quickly," she said.

CHAPTER XVI

SIR JOHN GARTH

SLOWLY, under paling stars, the stern-wheel steamer *Nautilus* thrashed her way against the tide of the Chinde mouth. The air, cleared by a recent shower, blew brisk and sweet; the yellow water ran strongly. It was as much as the *Nautilus* could do to hold her own, for she was hampered by full cargo barges and her engines were patched and obsolete. On the upper deck the native pilot stood alone, his eyes cast anxiously before him. Every moment the wheel spun beneath his ready hands, the steering chains followed with a rattle, and the little boat checked and nosed as the devious channel turned beneath her stem. So closely, at times, must she approach the shore that her decks almost met the branches of the mangroves, clinging with claw-like roots at the water's brim. The scenery began and ended with mangroves. At every bend fresh masses of them came into view; on either hand they slid away and closed again like dim green curtains on the vessel's wake.

A certain characteristic beauty is not lacking, it must be admitted, to the great swamp-forests that flourish on the tidal estuaries of the tropics. Especially perhaps is their rank verdure welcome to one who comes among them against stream, with eyes staled by long survey of the seas. So at least I have felt. Passing, as one

does, at full steam through these deltaic jungles one has not time to be conscious of their profound monotone, their exclusive repetition of a single type. Even as the sun's disc showed above the horizon the aspect of the banks began to change. The breadth of the stream increased continually. At its edges, and beyond them, towards the central current, appeared bright pebble beaches and tongues of sand. The mangroves grew thinner, finally ceased; other trees replaced them, diversified by wild meadows full of tufted grasses and radiant flowers.

A few minutes later the *Nautilus* swung clear of the Chinde and, with a loud scream from her whistle, moved into the shining flow of the right Zambezi. Early though it was the wild life of the river stirred everywhere. Flocks of egrets, ghost white, tipped on neck and shoulders with creamy plumes as fine as lace, passed silently, fanning the water level in their easy flight. Ducks paddled among the reeds. Ash-grey cranes stood watchful in the shallows. Clouds of slim bee-eaters, all rose-pink and azure, wheeled and darted, uttering incessantly their faint, sweet call. Among them flew gilt-beaked terns, pied plovers, with large ruby eyes, kingfishers, swift and brilliant as light, gaunt black ibises, grey and bronze sandpipers—and above them, high above them all, a Bateleur eagle hung in the middle sky, his fierce head outstretched, the points of his immense wings recurved against the breeze, motionless as a painted bird upon a screen.

Sir John Garth, then Governor of Namasiland, was an administrator of the old-fashioned sort, and perhaps none the worse for that. If he was somewhat deficient in the arts of public oratory, dispatch writing, and other qualifications appropriate to the office of a modern pro-consul, he made up for those shortcomings by a high

degree of native shrewdness, and particularly by understanding the country and people whom he governed as few officials in these times trouble themselves to do. The adventurous son of a rural parson, he had come to Africa in his youth without money or influence ; certainly without any thought of a career in the public service, than which nothing at that time was farther from his ambitions.

Namasiland was then merely a part of unannexed and unconsidered Africa, wherein a few British traders and missionaries had established themselves on a decidedly precarious footing among the native tribes—a country about which next to nothing was known and for which no European government was anxious to accept responsibility, least of all the British Government, whose hands were overfull of such unprofitable charges already. If lack of official encouragement could have killed the infant settlement, it must have expired almost as soon as it was born ; however, after the obstinate fashion of British settlements, it hung on somehow, maintaining its friendless and unrecognized existence in the teeth of most of those evils from which comfortable citizens at home are in the habit of beseeching the Lord to deliver them.

If the credit of this was due to any one man rather than another, John Garth by common consent was that man. He it was who negotiated those treaties with the friendly chiefs on which our title to the colony rests to this day ; he, with his native levies, who kept the hostile tribes in check, stamped out the nests of the hill robbers, and broke the back of the local slave trade ; he who acted as general arbiter within the settlement and pleaded its cause, in and out of season, with the authorities at home.

So when, at last, the little community had painfully developed to a point where its claims to recognition could no longer be ignored, and a British Protectorate

was formally proclaimed "in and over the territory of Namasiland," John Garth became its first Commissioner and ultimately its Governor; not because Downing Street felt any gratitude for his embarrassing gift of a new colony, but because no office-bred nominee could be found who wanted the post or could have coped with its unusual responsibilities.

Just for that reason it suited John Garth excellently. From the Zambezi valley to the shores of Tanganyika there was hardly a square mile where he was not as much at home as you or I might be between Piccadilly Circus and Apsley House. The breath of the woods and deserts was sweet in his nostrils. He liked the big, rough, elemental problems of a young country; he liked a free hand, and he hated red tape like poison.

If he was not a brilliant administrator, he had at least one of the qualities of a great one, for his judgment of men was unfailing. In other directions he made little mistakes sometimes and big ones now and then, but at least he never put a knave into a place of trust, or a weakling into a place of power, and wherever he found good material he had the courage to make the most of it, with scant regard for seniority or any other fetish. That gained him some enemies of course among the more aspidously minded, but the enemies of a Governor in his own territory speak in whispers, so he heard nothing of their criticisms, and what he may have guessed did not trouble him, for he knew that no man who tries to do his duty in a position of great authority can hope to please every one.

"Don't think I despise honest mediocrity," he would say. "On the contrary, I respect it. It is quite useful in its place, only its place is not at the top."

There was no shortage, among his staff, of conscientious men, hard working men, discreet and loyal men—there is no such shortage in our colonial service anywhere—but

unfortunately one may be endowed with conscience and industry, with loyalty and discretion, and half the virtues in the saints' calendar to boot, without possessing the gift of leadership. Men who have it, whatever otherwise their faults may be, are hard to come by and not to be wasted. Sir John was always looking for them. Yet here was Daunt Tremenere, who might have done great things, wasting himself, or so it appeared. His sudden resignation had puzzled the Governor a good deal, and that he should now be returning to the country with no more definite purpose in view than a mere hunting trip seemed hardly less strange.

"It's a pity," the old man reflected. "We shall want a Lieutenant-Governor soon, and he was just the man for that. He liked his job at Fort Felix too, and he meant to come back to it. Why has he thrown it up then? And having thrown it up, why is he heading out here again? Not to loaf, if I know him. Not just for a few months' hunting. He could have got as much of that as he wanted without cutting the service. I wonder what he is up to."

He paused for a moment and called to his aide-de-camp in the next room.

"Come here a minute, Fane. I hear Tremenere is on his way up the river and I want to see him. Just telegraph, will you, and ask him to stay with me while he is here. I believe he has a friend with him—Lord Somebody—I can't remember the name. In that case you will ask them both, of course."

The invitation suited Daunt's plans well enough, for he had already decided that Sir John must be taken into confidence. The old man's advice and countenance would be invaluable, and a secret was as safe with him as with a rock. Besides, he was the Governor after all, and as such had a right to be consulted.

"I want to speak to you about something important,

sir," Daunt said, the morning after his arrival. "Can you spare me half an hour?"

Sir John nodded.

"Well, you have heard, I suppose, that Brackenham and I are out here on an ordinary shooting trip. That is the general belief anyhow, and I don't want to disturb it as far as others are concerned. But in your case it is different. I think I ought to tell you that shooting is not our object—except incidentally."

The Governor blinked his eyes, a trick he had when anything interested him.

"I rather imagined that might be so," he observed drily. "And now, since you have told me what you are not going to do, may I ask what it is you are really after?"

"Certainly. That's what I wanted to talk about. To come to the point—you have heard of Mandanjovu?"

"The Ivory Graves? Of course. Every one has. But you don't mean to tell me you are going to look for them?"

"Why not? Don't you believe in them?"

"Oh, well, I won't go so far as to say that they may not exist. Legends as old as that generally have some sort of foundation. What you won't make me believe though is that you have the remotest chance of finding them. They might be almost anywhere between Kari and Bemba—say twenty thousand square miles of the roughest and wildest terrain in Africa. I hunted all over that country when I was younger, so I know what I'm talking about. In fact, I don't mind telling you that in those days I was foolish enough to waste a lot of time in searching for that very ivory myself. Several other men did the same, but we all had to give it up sooner or later. The proverbial needle in a haystack would be a thousand times easier to find than a cache of tusks

in such a wilderness as that. No—I'm sorry to throw cold water on your plans, Tremenere, but if you take my advice you will leave this alone."

Daunt pulled a pocket-book from his coat.

"You haven't got all the data yet, sir," he said quietly. "I'm just coming to that."

He took out Chenjovu's parchment forthwith and laid it on the table.

"There is the bundle of hay," he went on, smoothing it out with his hand. "And there is the needle."

He pointed as he spoke to the red spot in the midst of the tracing.

"I'm afraid this won't convey much to you as it stands, but I'll explain things from the beginning. It's rather a long story."

The Governor lit a cigar and pushed the box across to his guest. His eyes were blinking ecstatically. When he had heard the tale to an end he rose and began to walk about the room in a sort of amazement.

"Why, I believe you have it, Tremenere! I do indeed," he exclaimed. "Chenjovu was the last survivor of the Angoni wanderings. If any one living in our time knew that secret it was he. Odd, though, that he should have kept it so long from all men to tell it to you in the end. How did you get it out of him?"

"I didn't get it out of him at all. He told me of his own accord. He liked me, I think. I knew him very well—and he was dying, you see."

Sir John took the parchment to a window and examined it attentively for some minutes.

"It is perfectly clear," he said at last. "Any one could find the way by this and by what you've told me. I might have known you were not the man to commit yourself to a fool's errand. Well, if you want any help that I can give, let me know. This is going to be a very big thing."

"Thank you, sir. Assuming that we find the ivory, we may need some assistance to bring it down—cargo space and so on. I don't think I need trouble you till then."

"You'll take a police escort, of course."

Daunt shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want too many mouths to feed," he said.

"I daresay. And I don't want to have to send an expedition up there to rescue you," Sir John retorted—"still less to avenge you," he added drily. "Therefore I will not allow you to go that way without an escort—you understand?"

Daunt smiled.

"You mean it is an order, sir?"

"Certainly I do. Tell Stewart to give you thirty askari. I hope you won't need them, but it's a queer part of the country and I don't believe in asking for trouble. There is one more point too—don't you think you had better take another European with you? I've no doubt Brackenham is a very good fellow and a very pleasant companion, but remember he knows absolutely nothing of the country or the natives or the language, so with the best will in the world I don't see how he is going to help you much at first."

Daunt reflected. There was sound sense in the suggestion. The control of a large caravan, with its porters, guides, escort, and camp followers, is always a knotty business, and its complications are much increased in Africa by the peculiarities of the Bantu character. Black men have abundant good qualities, but they cannot be relied on for anything requiring initiative and method, unless sustained and directed at every step by some intelligence superior to their own. Daunt knew them too well not to appreciate that.

"I agree, sir," he said presently. "The only difficulty is that I don't know where to find the right man. No doubt there are plenty who would be glad to come, but

we are going into a queer part of the country, as you said just now, and it's a long way. I couldn't risk taking any one who isn't thoroughly suitable."

"Well, I was going to suggest Nicky Claussen," the Governor remarked. "You know him, of course. Everybody does. He is absolutely trustworthy, and there isn't a handier man in the bush between here and Tanganyika. The natives like him too. I don't think you could do better."

Daunt looked up. "Ah! I hadn't thought of Nicky," he said.

Nicholas Claussen was a Swede—a little, thin, silent man, who had begun life as cabin-boy on a sailing ship, and, tiring of the brutalities of a drunken skipper, had slipped ashore one night at Lorenzo Marques, to wander thence into the African hinterland, which had been his home now for forty years—that is, if any one can be said to have a home who lived as Nicky did. Hunting here, prospecting there, applying himself at odd moments to any chance job that could be done out of doors, and always saving a little money from year to year, he was reputed now a man of reasonable substance. Yet he would never settle down or even build himself a house, for he had lived so long in the open that stone walls for him a prison made, and he could not rest but under the naked sky. It was popularly believed that in his youth he had dwelt in trees. At any rate, he was as much at home in the bush as a Wanderobo tracker, and despite his sixty hard years and the fact that scarcely a bone in his body had not been broken at one time or another, for he had been gored and mauled and stamped on by nearly every kind of wild animal, no man in Africa, white or black, could outmarch or outwit Nicky Claussen in the woods he loved.

Daunt had met him once or twice and knew enough about him to be aware that he was honest, cool, and

sober ; tenacious of his own counsel ; a man generally liked, yet of few intimacies, and withal, curiously well-informed for one of his class and habits.

" Yes ; Nicky would be the very man," he said. " But would he come, do you think ? He always seems to have some undertaking of his own in hand."

" I am pretty sure he would come," Sir John answered. " At any rate we can send for him and find out. Luckily he happens to be here now, but you know what a vagrant he is. The sooner we get hold of him the better."

Nicky was emphatically a man who knew his own mind. He had a quick eye for the essential points of a contract and, once these were settled to his satisfaction, his decision followed immediately, without any of the humming, and hawing, and thinking it over which mark the dealings of more timid or more grasping natures. Where were they going ? how long would they be away ? what were the terms ? That was all he wanted to know, and in a few minutes the matter was agreed. Yes, he would come ; he knew all that country towards Bemba. Yes, it was a difficult country and little travelled. Besides himself no white man living now had been far into it—except His Excellency of course. He bowed ceremoniously towards the Governor as he spoke. When could he be ready ? He was ready as he stood, but there were porters to be engaged, and so on. Would that day week be soon enough ? Yes ! Then he would set about getting men at once ; and their destination was to be kept secret : certainly, he would not forget that.

" I told you so," Sir John remarked, laughing, as the little man withdrew. " He is in his element now. This is just the sort of job he enjoys, and no wonder."

A wistful look crossed his old face for a moment.

" It's a man's life the ulendo," * he said. " I wish I

* *Ulendo*, travel.

was coming with you. Odd how one longs sometimes for the smell of the burnt grass and the rain in the woods."

"I wish you were coming indeed, sir."

"Ah well! I'm past that sort of thing now; besides, I've no time for it. Look at this!"

He pointed to the great heap of dispatches and telegrams on his desk.

"You had better go and amuse yourself somehow, Tremenere, until it is time to start. Nicky and his tenga-tenga * will be ready to the moment—you may be sure of that."

* *Tenga-tenga*, porters.

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT OF THE HUNTING, HUNTER BOLD ?

IT was near the end of November. To some preliminary freshets a spell of fine weather had lately succeeded, as often happens before the break of the true rains, and the expedition, thus favoured, had advanced at such speed as to have crossed the western frontier of Namasiland.

Nothing stirred as yet in the camp under the mimosas, for it was scarce five in the morning. From the tents of Daunt and Claussen came the deep regular breathing of healthy men asleep. Here and there a drowsy native, touched by the chill of dawn, sat close over the camp fire, his chin on his knees. Only Brackenham, to whom the life of the wilderness was new, had exchanged his dreams, an hour since, for the more vivid enchantments of the forest.

The cold fog that had lain all night in the valleys was now in process of dissolution, leaving behind it a residue of iridescent drops on every leaf and stone. The light of equatorial dawn pulsed slowly through a web of boughs and foliage. A temperate warmth, as of an English May day, filled the woods, and drew forth the incense of the humid earth. Fruit pigeons, waking with a fuss and flutter of wing feathers, began to utter their soft matin calls. Repeatedly came the challenging cry of the francolin, the croak of the white necked raven,

less often the scream of the crested turaco. A multitude of lesser fowl—pied sparrows, golden weaver finches, blue and scarlet barbets, sun birds, bishop birds, widow birds, made all the long grasses alive with hum and twitter. There is no hour in the span of a tropic day so pleasant and lovely as this first hour of dawn. Like some tyrant, who hides his early ambition under a smooth countenance, and climbs by scarcely noticeable degrees to place and power, so mildly shines the newly risen sun, so gently does he move towards his brazen zenith. All animate things avail themselves of this brief period of clemency, this kind interregnum between perilous night and pitiless noon, to come forth from their roosts and burrows for a while, to preen their coats, plummy or furry, and tune their voices, sweet or discordant, to frisk and caracole, eat, drink, and be merry.

But Brackenham walked that morning among those forest ways and creatures unmindful of their beauty. He moved slowly, with lowered head, his eyes on the ground before him, watchful only for the track of slender hoofs that had lately passed there. Wherever this spoor could be seen it showed fresh and neat and firmly cut, for it was the spoor of koodoo, and koodoo are clean steppers, as every hunter knows. But these had travelled in the midst of a game path, and other animals, following after, had scored across the graceful prints and broken or smothered them. Here a great waterbuck had planted his loose splay foot, a crowd of buffaloes had tramped their careless way. Here was the never to be mistaken impress of the sable antelope, broad and downright, round horse-like tracks of cantering zebra, marks uncountable of hartebeeste and reedbuck, pad stamps of fox and jackal, tiny, pointed feet of oribi and duiker.

To pick the line of the koodoo in such surroundings

was not easy for a beginner, and Brackenham was almost regretting that he had brought no native tracker with him when, to his relief, the spoor that he was following turned suddenly from the game path and plunged into the untrodden woods. Who ran might read it then; a printed page could hardly have been plainer. Full now of hope, and able at last to turn his eyes to larger surveys, the hunter increased his pace and began to look freely on all sides of the way. The forest was growing thinner every moment and changing too in character. The stiff pre-Raphaelite masuku trees that press so close upon each other, and are so characteristic of the central parts of the bush, opened out gradually, giving place to grotesque baobabs and fragrant flat-topped mimosas. Presently, under the pendent edges of leafage, appeared a long yellowish line, the fringe of a dambo, as those natural meadows are called which occur so often all through the well timbered regions of East Central Africa. Now it is in these same dambos chiefly that game is like to be found at rest or feeding. To see a wild animal in the deep woods is usually to see it for an instant only; some brown dappled thing, poised for flight, with neck uplifted and wide startled eyes—before you can move the safety-catch of your rifle it is gone. Indeed, you may pass perhaps through twenty miles of such forest and never catch more than a glimpse of horn or hide as the swift buck vanish from the ken of their enemy. But in the pleasant, sunny glades all grass-eating beasts love to congregate, and, relaxed by the sense of being upon open ground, the wariest of them may be stalked and killed there.

Casting about for some point of vantage from which to survey the field, Brackenham noticed an old ant-hill patched with low scrub. He gained it presently, crept half-way up its side and peered anxiously forth. Two oribi were moving about close by with the peculiar

slinking gait which distinguishes these pretty creatures, pausing now and then to draw up a hind-leg or lick a shoulder. A little farther off was a troop of zebras ; besides these, nothing. Very carefully the watcher turned and crawled to the other side of the cone, raised his chin, and saw on the instant a great bull koodoo standing quietly in the midst of the grass.

A steady survey through field-glasses showed that he was feeding busily, only twitching his ears and tail now and then ; so far so good. The wind too was not unfavourable to the hunter, but here his advantage ceased. The bull was in truth most securely placed, being nearly in the centre of the dambo, on a stretch of short new grass, with no cover anywhere near him, saving one meagre thorn-bush about three hundred yards away.

Brackenham reflected. He might fire from where he lay, under the ant-hill, but the range was a long one, even for so good a shot as he—more than five hundred yards as he judged it—and he hated to wound a beast. A stalk from the lower end of the dambo, where there was more cover, was not to be thought of, for he would have to make it down wind. The thorn-bush then must be his objective, poor shelter though it was, and hard to come at. He slid down to the level of the dambo and began to move forward, at first on his hands and knees, presently flat on the ground.

Now to cover any considerable distance in this serpentine style under the full blaze of an African sun, is more difficult and even painful than any one would believe who has not tried it. Not for nothing was the primeval curse laid upon the author of our downfall, "On thy belly shalt thou go and dust shalt thou eat." Brackenham realized that as he writhed awkwardly over the parched earth, stopping at ever shortening intervals to stretch his racked limbs and wipe the

trickling sweat from his eyes. The koodoo was still in the same spot, but had begun now to raise its head frequently, with such an air of suspicion that Brackenham feared at first lest it had seen him. He noticed, however, presently, that its gaze, when this happened was not turned towards him at all, but nearly at right angles to his line of approach. This puzzled him for a little, till he reflected that the cows belonging to the herd must be somewhere near by, hidden perhaps under the fringes of the surrounding forest, and that the bull was probably keeping them under a sort of surveillance. Meanwhile this diversion, to whatever due, was all in his favour and he took advantage of it accordingly, dragging himself forward as hard as he could till he gained the little bush at last, and under cover of it wriggled himself cautiously into a sitting position.

Through the wiry branches the koodoo now showed with a distinctness almost startling. The sun shone full upon it, revealing every detail of its shape and colour; the grey coat, the powerful body and shapely limbs, the white chevron between the eyes, and the lean aristocratic head, so gallantly poised beneath its heavy crowning horns, that curved away in two great open spirals, sixty inches to the tips. For a little the hunter's eyes lingered in the fixity of sheer admiration on his unconscious quarry. Then, pushing a cartridge into his rifle, he softly closed the breech, raised the leaf of the sight and put the butt to his shoulder. The muzzle bead settled fairly into the angle of the back-sight till its rim stood bright and steady in the notch against the bull's grey hide. For a few seconds Brackenham let it dwell there, exulting in the certainty of his hand and eye. "A hundred to one on the rifle," he thought, "a hundred to one against the buck." And even as his cheek pressed the walnut stock more closely, even as his forefinger began to curl about the trigger, a loud

report burst from another quarter of the field ; a trail of smoke, marking the explosion of a charge of black powder, swept into the air ; the koodoo dropped upon its knees, recovered itself, galloped fifty yards, and fell over, dead, what time Brackenham, looking round in the extremity of astonishment, beheld its slayer rise upright from the grass.

This was a lean active fellow, clad in dirty brown flannel shirt and blue cloth trousers, lounging of gait, very swart of complexion. Brackenham's first impulse was to stand up and hail him, but on second thoughts he waited. The stranger, who had evidently no suspicion of the other's presence, walked unconcernedly to the dead koodoo, looked at it for a minute or two, and began to pull its head about, as though admiring the spread of its great horns. Brackenham, through his field-glasses, watched the man narrowly. His face, in its frame of black, uncombed hair, was now plainly visible. Though full of intelligence it was not a pleasant face. There was that in it which finally decided Brackenham not to reveal himself, and, waiting only till the other's back was turned, he made off into the thickness of the woods.

Who could this stranger be, he asked himself, and what was his purpose there ? He had something of the look of a vagabond prospector or trader, but in those days none such ventured far into the interior. They were now a full week's march from the lake coast. How came this fellow to be where he was then, so near their own tents, and nothing known of his presence ? The natives at least must have been aware of it. It was in no way possible for a European to pass through the country without their knowledge ; his movements would be a welcome theme of gossip and speculation in every village—yet of this mysterious traveller none had spoken.

Still meditating on these problems Brackenham made his way back to camp, where he found Daunt and Claussen at breakfast.

"What of the hunting, hunter bold?" the former asked.

Brackenham shook his head.

"Didn't you find your koodoo then?"

"Yes, indeed I did; and such a beauty. But I was just too late—I hadn't counted on another Richmond in the field, you see."

Tremenere fixed a keen pair of eyes on his friend.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Nor do I," Brackenham rejoined drily. "However, I'll tell you what happened."

When he had recounted his adventure a short silence befell. Tremenerere had picked up a hard boiled egg and was peeling it carefully.

"Tell me, Brack," he said presently, without raising his head, "Did this man look like a half-caste at all?"

"Well, now that you suggest it, yes—he had that appearance rather. I only noticed at the time that he was very dark."

"Ah! now I want you to try and remember everything you can about the fellow; it's important. I'll explain why afterwards. You saw him plainly, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, quite. He was some distance away of course, but I had my field-glasses, and they are very good ones. I could see him almost as clearly as I see you now."

"Very well; I'm going to ask you some questions. How old did he look?"

"Round about thirty—rather more than less perhaps."

"Dress?"

"A sort of sleeveless khaki shirt open at the neck. Dark blue trousers; no hat."

"How about height and build?"

"Not very tall; muscular, especially about the neck and chest; a bit bow-legged."

"Type of face?"

"Very dark, sort of olive skin—I told you that. Rough black hair; features mixed. Rather an intelligent face, you know, but not a nice one. The sort of face that would put most men on their guard I should think, at any rate it put me on mine. I was going to hail the chap at first, but after I'd had a good stare at him I thought I wouldn't."

"H'm! that was just as well perhaps. You didn't happen to notice anything else about him, did you? Anything peculiar?"

"Peculiar? I don't think so. At least—wait a bit!—yes! When he was looking at the dead koodoo he stretched himself and yawned, I remember, and showed his teeth. They looked oddly shaped somehow."

"How do you mean—oddly shaped?"

"Well I can't swear to it, mind. I wasn't close enough for that, even with the glasses, but it seemed to me that they were pointed, like a shark's."

Claussen made a sudden movement.

"Ah! I thought so," Tremenere said. "Pass me the salt, will you? Thanks, Brack—an excellent portrait. You recognize the original, Nicky?"

The Swede nodded.

"Xavier," he answered. "Strange I had not thought of him till milord spoke of those filed teeth of his. Yes, it is he, no doubt, and that may be troublesome for us."

Tremenere shrugged his shoulders. "Xavier it is," he said, "and wherever that rascal goes there is likely to be some sort of mischief afoot—I agree with you there, Nicky. Still, it doesn't follow that he is out to interfere with us. I've a notion we're too strong for that."

"Ah! but you will do well to be careful of this man, my captain," Claussen rejoined. "Surely you have heard how he has sworn to kill you—it is common talk—because of that time, you remember, when you thrashed him at Fort Felix yonder. What is he doing here? Two weeks since he was at Chiramoyo going to Quelimane, that I know. Well, now he has changed his mind, you see. He has not gone to Quelimane at all. He is here."

"Don't make our flesh creep, Nicky," Daunt exclaimed, laughing. "It's just a coincidence most likely—an accident, you know. He is always wandering about."

"Yes; but I think it is not an accident," the Swede persisted.

Brackenham, who had been listening in some bewilderment, put his hand on Daunt's arm.

"I don't quite follow all this," he remarked. "Tell me who and what the chap is. I may as well know."

"Certainly, you shall know all I can tell you. The man is a Portuguese half-caste; about as complete a rascal as there is, I should think, and a particularly cunning one to boot, or he must have been hanged long ago. His mother was an Awemba woman, and he was brought up with her people, which accounts for his influence with the natives up here. No other traders dare go among them, so this beast has the field to himself, and what with smuggling, and slave dealing, and gun running, and so on, he drives a very profitable business I fancy. At any rate he can afford to sit down every now and then at one of the liquor shops on the lake and keep himself comfortably drunk for two or three weeks at a stretch. The only time I ever came across him was after one of these periodical treats."

"Yes?" Brackenham put in interrogatively as the other paused.

"Well, it isn't a pleasant story. He was camped close to Fort Felix at the time. It was in the evening, and I had gone out for a walk when I heard a woman squalling in the bush, so I moved up to see what the matter was. Well, I found a native girl—a poor little undersized slip of a thing; not more than about sixteen she looked—triced up to a tree, and this same Xavier welting her right and left—with a rawhide whip, mark you! Of course he was still half fuddled, or he wouldn't have ventured to amuse himself in that way within a mile of a British fort. I had a judicial warrant then, and no doubt I ought to have arrested the fellow and dealt with him in due course according to the law, but my blood being rather hot at the moment I adopted the most summary form of jurisdiction there is and knocked him down, and as he showed no disposition to get up again, I told the native orderly who had followed me to give the beast a taste of his own whip, which was done on the spot before a goodly crowd—only it was more than a taste he got! All very irregular of course; but in the same circumstances I would do it again."

Daunt's face hardened as he told the tale.

"Good for you," Brackenham exclaimed cheerfully. "But that chap must be worth watching, surely! Dagoes are awfully vindictive, aren't they?"

Tremenere laughed.

"Perhaps they are, Brack, I don't know. We'll keep our eyes open, of course, but scamps of that kidney are apt to let I dare not wait upon I would. Anyhow, we shall have a cold breakfast if we waste any more time in discussing him, and he isn't worth that."

CHAPTER XVIII

MANCHICHI

LIGHTLY as Daunt Tremenere had treated the subject of the half-caste as a breakfast table topic, he was too cool and wary to dismiss it wholly from his private mind. Certainly his expressed contempt for Xavier was no affectation, but it was the sort of contempt one may feel for a snake. The man was rotten-hearted like most cross-breeds he told himself—"willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike." That one of his measure would hazard any direct interference with an armed column seemed hardly to be believed. Yet the gravest mischief is often wrought by devious means, and there are times when the covert malice of a coward is more to be feared than the bared weapon of an open enemy. Daunt understood that well enough. A soldier by instinct and training, he looked at the situation with a soldier's eye. If he had been alone it would have exercised him less, but as the head of an expedition he had to reckon with the responsibilities of leadership, and it was not in his nature to take them lightly.

They had now passed beyond the utmost threshold of civilization; the nearest European station lay more than two hundred miles behind them, and made roads had been replaced, long since, by cramped and uncertain footpaths running through a country that seemed to grow wilder and more forbidding at every step. Daunt's

chief concern now was for his food supplies. He was not without some uneasiness lest the malignant influence of the half-caste might induce the natives on his line of march to refuse the grain on which his men depended. That would be an easy trick to play, and its effect might well be paralysing. An African in full work needs some two pounds of cereals a day, and to transport enough rations on this scale to feed a big caravan, with its porters, escort, and camp followers, throughout a long journey is impossible, so that, apart from the light reserve stock usually carried to meet emergencies, every such column must live on the country through which it moves. There is no difficulty about that where the local natives are friendly, but Daunt knew that the tribes ahead of him now were sullen and inhospitable. Hitherto he had counted on being able to humour them sufficiently to obtain supplies and a free passage, for both he and Claussen had the knack of "getting on" with natives, but the intervention of a man like Xavier might upset everything. The half-breed's authority with these people was so complete that a word from him would be enough, probably, to boycott the whole expedition. If that happened Daunt was resolved that, rather than turn back, he would take what he needed by force, but he hated the idea of such a policy from every point of view.

Great was his relief then when day followed day and nothing untoward occurred. Instead of obstructing the expedition the natives seemed to go out of their way to assist it. If some influential agent had preceded the column to negotiate in its interests things could hardly have gone more smoothly. Food was forthcoming in abundance; each village furnished guides to the next; of Xavier there was no sign, and inquiries about him brought none but negative answers. The natives had not seen him for a long time, they said, and

had no idea where he was. How should they? Manchichi came and went, no man knew whence or whither.

"Why do they call him Manchichi?" Brackenham asked. "What does it mean?"

"It is the big horned owl of these parts," Daunt explained; "a fly-by-night like Xavier himself. That's how he comes by the nickname probably."

Claussen shook his head.

"There is another reason," he said. "You know the cry of that owl, my captain; how strangely it sounds—not like the voice of any other bird. Well, this man uses it as his signal call."

"Ah! Another Chouan! That may be worth knowing; but I'm beginning to think we needn't worry ourselves about Xavier. I was never inclined to much, and now he seems to have vanished."

The Swede, who was whittling a piece of wood, said nothing.

"Else we should have seen him again, surely, by this time, or heard of him at least. He must have crossed our path by accident and gone on somewhere. Eh, Nicky?"

"It may be so," Claussen answered, after a little, "but I think not, my captain. We don't see him perhaps, but what of that? He is as quick as a fox in the bush. If he does not wish to be seen he will not be seen."

"Well, but in that case, Nicky, how do you explain all this good luck we have had? We expected a certain amount of difficulty with the tribes hereabouts, and instead of that they've helped us at every step. We're ahead of time as it is, and if things go on like this we ought to make Mandanjovu in another ten days, according to my reckoning. That doesn't look as if any one was out to interfere with us, does it?"

Claussen continued to carve his slip of wood.

"I will tell you what I think," he said presently. "Manchichi is not a fool. He knows we have not come as far as this to hunt game. There is only one thing worth hunting for in this hinterland, and if we find it—well, he finds it too. That explains everything. The natives—why have they been helping us all the way, as you said just now? Because they have been ordered to help us. So I think that, if anything is going to happen, it will happen after we have found the ivory. Very soon after, perhaps—but not before."

Tremenere filled his pipe and smoked thoughtfully for a minute or two.

"I see," he rejoined at last. "An ingenious theory, Nicky, but I don't catch the point of it quite. It is possible, I suppose, that the man might sneak after us and hang about till we find the stuff, but how would that profit him? I don't understand where he comes in against thirty rifles."

Claussen shrugged his shoulders. "He could set ten spearmen against every one of our rifles," he said.

"Oh come, Nicky!" Daunt returned, laughing. "Don't make our flesh creep. You know what trained musketry can do against natives, and Xavier knows it too. He isn't mad enough to try that sort of thing at any odds, I fancy, and if he did he hasn't the nerve to carry it through."

"Ay, but listen," the Swede persisted. "He knows the Ivory Graves are in this country somewhere. All his life he has been seeking them. He tried to get the secret from Chenjovu and could not, and now, I am sure, he has found out or guessed that you have it. So I think he will be in the mood for desperate chances, and we are three hundred miles from anywhere. Besides, he hates you, my captain, and hate will steel even a coward's heart."

Brackenham, who had been listening, rubbed his hands.

"This is getting interesting," he remarked. "The plot shows a tendency to thicken. Well, if it comes to shooting in earnest I may be some use yet."

He picked up his empty rifle as he spoke. Just then a large odd-looking bird flapped past them with soundless wavering flight.

"By Jove! A manchichi—a horned owl!" Daunt exclaimed. "That's a curious thing. One hardly ever sees them abroad in the daylight."

The bird went on and settled on the bare branch of a baobab tree about a hundred and fifty yards away. Brackenham pushed a clip of cartridges into the breech of his rifle.

"I don't like killing owls as a rule," he said, "but as this is Mister Xavier's namesake and mascot, I'm going to let him have it. We'll take the result of this shot as an omen."

He fired on the instant. A puff of feathers flew into the air and the bird fell like a plummet.

"Bravo!" cried Daunt. "I wish that had been Xavier's head."

He turned to Claussen, who was looking rather astonished.

"You think that was just a chance hit, don't you, Nicky?"

The Swede smiled. "It was a wonderful shot," he said politely.

"Come, Brack," Daunt went on, "convince this doubting Thomas. Do you see that little sapling stump sticking out of the cliff there? It's a bit farther off; two hundred yards perhaps or a trifle more."

Claussen shaded his eyes with his hand. The sapling might have been four inches in diameter and would hardly have been visible, but that it stood in relief against the bare rock behind it. Brackenham's glance measured the distance carefully.

"I can't back myself to do this sort of thing every time, you know," he said. "However, here goes."

He altered the sighting of his rifle, dwelt a little longer on the trigger, and fired again. The top of the stump disappeared in a shower of splinters.

Nicky Claussen came up to him. "Milord, I beg your pardon that I took your first shot for a lucky one," he said. "I am getting an old man. I have hunted for forty years and I know how to use my rifle, for I have often had to live by it. But I never saw or heard of such shooting as that."

"Handsomely said, Nicky," Daunt exclaimed, laughing.

Brackenham's honest face reddened. "It's only a knack," he protested, in some confusion. "And it's about the only thing I can do."

CHAPTER XIX

THE INVISIBLE PEAKS

AS they went on the native villages grew fewer, isolated huts replacing them; presently these also ceased, and the column moved into a country wherein there seemed to be no trace of human habitation. This accorded perfectly with what Chenjovu had said, that the perished tribe had dwelt in a place utterly apart.

Soon afterwards a faint grey line which, the day before, had showed like a mere drift of cloud, shaped itself definitely into a semicircular barrier of rock enclosing a flat amphitheatre. Here again all was solitude, yet, as they marched, their feet now stumbled continually over long hummocks hidden in the grass.

Brackenham drove his heel against one of the banks.

"Why, they're as hard as iron," he said. "What is it? A fossilized potato field?"

"That's a better guess than you think," Daunt answered. "We've struck some old food gardens."

"Food gardens in this wilderness?"

"It wasn't a wilderness always," the other said. "Wherever you find this sort of corduroy ground in Africa you may be sure there were villages once. It must be very long since these fields were abandoned,

but the marks of native tillage are never wiped out. The sun just bakes the ridges and furrows, you see, and the scrub grows over them, and there they remain. There must have been a big settlement here; you can tell that from the size of the plantations."

"Who do you suppose they were, then—the people who lived here?"

"They were elephant hunters," Daunt said.

"Elephant hunters? You mean——"

"I mean I think we have arrived, or nearly so. The place must be somewhere hereabout if I've worked it out right."

Claussen shaded his eyes with his hand.

"What are you looking at?" Brackenham asked.

"I am looking for those two hills," the Swede answered. "You spoke of two hills, my captain, did you not?"

"Yes, hills—or it might be big shafts of rock perhaps. '*Chi modzi modzi mano*' according to what Chenjovu told me—like teeth, you know. So they must be fairly prominent," Daunt said.

He took out his field-glasses as he spoke, and scanned the ground before them attentively. It was an unbroken flat. Around it the envioning range stood like a wall, its rim level as the top of Table Mountain. Of the peaks there was no sign.

"They will show up presently," he declared. "I can't make out anything from here. We are looking into the eye of the sun."

By noon they had reached the midst of the plain and re-examined it on all sides with no better success.

"I can't have made a mistake," Daunt said. "We've followed the route exactly. The peaks ought to be visible by now, but otherwise everything is just as Chenjovu told me."

There was silence for a while.

"Come," Claussen suggested. "Let us go on a little. It is too early to camp yet."

They resumed their way accordingly, and, crossing the amphitheatre, pitched their tents an hour later within a mile or two of the barrier range. Daunt's heart misgave him as he stared again at that sheer wall. No break, no projection of any kind was apparent in any part of it. Its summit lay continuously level against the sky. Its scarp fell perpendicularly on all sides like some colossal rampart, and from its base the plain stretched flat as a floor.

"Never mind," Brackenham said, as they sat smoking that evening. "We'll have a good try round tomorrow. The peaks may be on the other side of the range."

Tremenere looked dubious.

"I hardly think so," he answered, "not from what Chenjovu told me; but we'll have a look there, anyhow. It's a nuisance this check. I'm sure we are on the right track, though I don't quite see my way yet. I think I'll turn in on it."

He moved towards his tent as he spoke, the eyes of his two companions following him curiously.

"Between ourselves, Nicky, what do you make of it?" Brackenham asked presently.

The Swede knocked the ashes out of his pipe slowly against the heel of his boot.

"Milord," he answered, after a little, "if we were seeking here a needle in a stack of hay, as your English proverb has it, I would say, seek on—it is a question of patience. But two hills! That is different. How can such things be overlooked? They are there or they are not there." He paused. "Perhaps a mistake has been made; I don't know. To milord, who is doubtless rich and happy like all lords, the matter of this ivory is perhaps of little account. And to me, who am getting

old, it is not much either. But for the captain—ah! that is another thing. For him I am sorry. This is his own quest; his mind is set upon it, and he is a man who hates to fail. Milord, who is his friend, has noticed that perhaps? ”

Nicky was right. If Daunt took the situation more nearly to heart than either of his associates it was precisely because, as the Swede had said, the venture was his own. The others had only come into it at his suggestion, on the faith of his assurances, and that touched his sense of responsibility to the quick. He had been prepared, and had prepared them, for anxieties and difficulties manifold, for stern fortunes and strange perils, but not for a mare's nest. Was it possible that Chenjovu had misled him? Not knowingly: of that he felt confident—but the Zulu had been a very old man when that tale was told, a dying man. Might not his memory have failed him, his fancy deceived him? And yet how soberly he had spoken; with what exactness and plenitude of detail. There had been nothing incoherent about his story; nothing suggestive of a faltering mind.

Next day they passed round the flank of the barrier and examined the country beyond. It shelved back from the nape of the ridge in an echelon of stony ledges, all seamed with moss and astir with lizards and dappled fritillary butterflies. As they slid and scrambled the laminated rock flaked under their boots. The air was bright and still as death. By noon they had made fourteen miles and were breast deep in elephant grass. The sense that their search was vain, which had oppressed them from the beginning, grew as they went, yet still they held to it stubbornly until dusk found them at their tents again, black with sweat and tired as dogs.

“Thanks, both of you,” Daunt said. “I never ex-

pected to hit it off on that side, but we were bound to try."

There seemed now, in truth, little prospect of hitting it off anywhere. Both Brackenham and Claussen were in favour of moving on, rather from loss of faith in their present situation than with any particular hopes elsewhere, but Tremenere would not hear of it. Next day indeed, instead of striking camp as they had suggested, he even set about strengthening its defences. Hitherto these had consisted merely of the light abattis of brushwood which travellers in Africa usually erect about their nightly halting-places, but now, by the leader's orders, the position was fully entrenched, not a little to the perplexity of his companions. To what end, they wondered, these solid and methodical earthworks, these rifle-pits, traverses, and emplacements? Daunt's continued assumption that the ivory must be somewhere near that spot; his explanation that, when found, it would have to be guarded until it could be removed, carried no conviction to their minds and perhaps not much to his own. In postponing the evacuation of the place he was influenced, in truth, less by any surviving hope of success than by the intense dislike of admitting failure, which was characteristic of his nature. The very completeness of the preparations he was now making gave expression to this feeling. They were a concrete negation of that tendency to quit which was beginning to be noticeable in his companions, and which irritated him the more because he was conscious at times of the same weakness himself.

But was it weakness after all? As day followed day a humiliating suspicion began to shape itself in his mind that, if there was weakness anywhere, it was in his own obstinacy, his senseless persistence in hopes now plainly untenable. In the circumstances, was that worth while? Was it even honest? There was all the differ-

ence in the world between reasoned perseverance in the face of adversity and mere sulky refusal to admit a defeat already palpable. Was he acting fairly towards the others, who had borne with him so patiently all through? They had trusted him, cast in their lot with his: he owed them frankness at least. Why hesitate any longer then to acknowledge plainly that his purpose had miscarried?

Having framed his mind to this course at last, he put it into execution with characteristic thoroughness.

"I'm afraid we must give it up," he said bluntly. "I ought to have recognized that earlier perhaps, but it isn't pleasant to admit that one has brought one's friends all this way on a fool's errand. We'll break camp to-morrow. It's no use saying I'm sorry for you both. It's been my fault—and I thought I was putting you on to such a good thing."

He flushed painfully as he spoke. To his arrogant self-confident temper such an avowal was extraordinarily difficult to make.

Brackenham put his hand for an instant on his friend's shoulder.

"You needn't waste sympathy on me, old fellow," he said. "I only came out here for the fun of the thing, and I've enjoyed every minute of this trip."

"I too," the Swede added. "My home is in the bush and my time is my own. What does it matter, my captain, here or elsewhere? I am always happy in the woods."

Tremenere turned on his would-be comforters with a certain roughness. They were not the men to reproach him, but he would rather have had the bitterest reproach just then than these well meant assurances.

"You two talk as if we had come here for a picnic," he retorted. "What you say is very kind of course, but it's beside the point. Nothing can alter the fact

that I've dragged you into a foolish adventure which has ended in disappointment, and that's all there is to be said, I think."

His companions looked at him with growing concern. His strong, hard held temper they knew, but to be petulant was strangely unlike him. He repented soon of his peevishness, tried to make amends for it, but the sense of failure stung him continuously, and black care that night was his bedfellow. What a fool he had been, throwing away substance for shadow, his career for a fairy tale! The impact of some great disaster he could have endured with better countenance. In tragic vicissitude there is always something inspiring, something to be faced, but here was only emptiness, the humiliation of mirage, and the long way home again.

Conscious of the futility of his thoughts, yet hopeless of escaping them, he rose at last and, pulling on some clothes, went out into the open. The camp was very still for it was now deep night, but a full moon rode in the middle sky, flooding the land with brightness. Careless of particular direction, and, in his abstracted mood, hardly sensible of it, Daunt began to walk slowly to where the barrier range gleamed in his path like a wall of hewn silver. Some calming influence, the freshness of the night air perhaps, seemed to clear his brain as he moved. At every step the misgivings which had assailed him receded before an overmastering conviction, for which he could assign no cause, that he was on the right track after all. Never had he felt so strangely confident, he who an hour since had been ready to despair. Around him lay, he could doubt it no longer, the field of that great battle in the wilderness of which Chenjovu had spoken. On just such a moonlit night the Zulu must have passed across it, as he, Daunt Tremenere, was passing now. Presently a murmur of

water caught his ear. What was it the old man had said ?

"A clear stream ran not fifty paces from us. The wounded youth could hear it where he lay."

Was it coincidence or could this be the same stream that now flowed in his path. He had an odd insistent feeling that it was indeed the same—and yet how could that be ? For if so, the peaks should be visible from that very spot.

"There, clear in the moonlight, they stood," the Zulu had told him, *"alike both in bigness and shape ; neither was the one higher than the other, but their tops ran slenderly to even points."*

If then this was the stream, this the spot, where were the peaks ?

So far the wayfarer had moved with bowed head, deep in thought. Now, mechanically, as though some finger had touched him, he lifted his eyes. And there, projecting cleanly from the face of the barrier before him, rose two colossal shafts of rock, their gradients coincident on all sides, their pinnacles bare and level as fangs, as closely matched as though some convulsion of nature had shaped them from a single mould. Between them and the scarp from which they sprang was a very narrow chasm—a mere cleft. Their lines of stratification lay unerringly parallel with those of the barrier itself. Even as Daunt looked the truth broke upon him, that they could not be distinguished from the sheer wall behind them unless viewed from the exact spot where he then stood.

Anne Stretton had been wont to say of Daunt, in his boyhood, that he was just an aristocratic Tom Tulliver, and there was a good deal of truth in that still. As he stood at gaze before those long-sought peaks, his first thought, that he had made good in spite of everything,

that he was going to convince his doubting comrades at last, was precisely what poor Tom's would have been, and it sank like balm into his mind. But his next was juster. After all, had he not been a doubter too, and with less excuse than they? He had left his tent that night bewildered, despairing, without conscious purpose. What though he had found the goal at last? Not his own faith, not his own judgment had led him there. Happy chance then? Most men would have said so. Yet cautious as he was and slow of belief, Daunt Tremenere knew in his heart that something else, some presence moving unseen before him, some clear insistent will outside his own, had drawn his steps along that certain way.

When he reached camp again it was near an hour past midnight. The native sentry challenged as he approached, and at the sound of the man's voice, Nicky Claussen, who slept as lightly as a buck, came out, knuckling his eyes in mild astonishment at the sight of his leader thus coated and booted at one in the morning.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"Everything has happened. Eureka, Nicky! I have found them!"

The Swede stared. "Found them!" he exclaimed in bewilderment.

"Yes; the Ivory Graves—or the peaks at least, and that amounts to the same thing. There's no mistake about it this time."

Claussen looked at him as though wondering if he were in his right senses.

"Pardon me. I don't understand," he said. "You have found the peaks, you say? Alone, at night? But we have searched on all sides. They must be far from here then?"

"No; they are quite near, only I know now why we

couldn't see them before. They're right against the barrier cliff—look just like part of it except from one spot, and I hit on that by accident, or God knows how. You can't make them out from here or anywhere else except from that one point. It sounds extraordinary, I daresay, but you must believe me, Nicky. I'm not mad or dreaming. You'll see for yourself soon."

His voice was cool enough; nothing in his looks suggested hallucination. The Swede's face cleared.

"I'll take you there in the morning," Tremenere went on. "We'll make an early start. Say at five, eh?"

Claussen shook his head. "I think we should go now, my captain," he said.

Daunt shrugged his shoulders. "At once? Well, I don't know. I should like an hour or two of sleep first, I think. You're rather impatient for our treasure, Nicky, aren't you?"

"It is not that," the Swede rejoined earnestly. "I am sure Manchichi's people are near us. No—I have seen nothing, but I know. It is like that when a man has lived much in the bush. One feels things. They are watching till we find the ivory for them. Let us go to this place now therefore, in the night. Even so we may be followed, but there is a better chance."

Daunt reflected for a moment. "You still stick to that notion of being followed, eh?" he said presently. "Very well, we'll go to-night. I don't mind."

Claussen glanced at the sky. "We must be quick or the dawn will catch us," he said. "Will you rouse milord? There are some things we shall want."

He dived into the store tent and began to pull out pick-axes and lanterns, while Daunt shook up the astonished Brackenham.

"No, Brack, there isn't time to explain now. I'll do that as we go along. We start in ten minutes, remember."

He called the sergeant of the guard, gave some necessary orders and turned away. The night was windless and cloudless ; the moon still shone in uncommon splendour. Daunt looked steadily at the exact spot where he now knew the peaks to be. There was no trace of them.

CHAPTER XX

THREE IN THE DARK

A RILL of water gushed with force from the rock, as Chenjovu had said, leaping outward in an arch of shining spray. Though swift it was of slender volume, so that the opening which it had cut for itself had but just enough lateral space to admit a man's body. This passage, slanting upwards into the earth, and so continuing for a little, led presently into an immense cavern.

"But I can't see anything," Brackenham exclaimed, as they stood on the threshold. "It's as black as Jorrock's cupboard."

He swung his hurricane lantern, whose rays seemed strangely pallid in that sea of gloom.

"Wait a bit!" Daunt rejoined. "Our eyes have to get accustomed to this. Are those rocks in front of us, or what?"

Claussen advanced into the darkness with cautious steps; all at once his voice came back to them, echoing grotesquely in the void.

"Rocks! My God no! See here!" he called, and throwing down a quantity of grass and sticks from a sack he was carrying set them alight. Instantly the dark heart of the cave was pierced with revealing flame. Daunt caught his breath. Brackenham made a step forward and stood still.

On every side the floor of the cave was heaped with ivory. The prodigious size of some of the tusks seemed to indicate that they had belonged to a larger breed of elephants than now exists, as Chenjovu had suggested. "No beasts on earth at this present carry teeth like that," the old Zulu had said, and, in truth, it seemed incredible that any jaws could have sustained their weight. In the uncertain light of the lanterns they had somewhat the appearance of fossilized monsters themselves, their veined and rounded surfaces pigmented by time to rufous yellows and rich umbers, some even to deep vandyke, for the newest of them must have lain in that strange grotto for generations—many, beyond doubt, for centuries. Yet in none was there any decay.

"It must be something in the soil that has kept them so sound all these years," Daunt said.

He picked up a loose clod as he spoke and crushed it idly in his fingers.

"What a game it must have been, hunting brutes with teeth like that," Brackenham remarked. "And there were no rifles in those days. Fancy tackling such mammoths with spears and arrows!"

Their eyes being now habituated to the gloom of the vault, they could make out its details with tolerable clearness. The walls showed a series of elaborate mural carvings, each depicting some incident in the chase of the elephant, whose bulky shape occupied the centre of every panel, surrounded by a multitude of armed human figures. The long ribbon of sculpture was surmounted by hieroglyphics, some crowded into a few inches, others running along the whole border of the design, while above these again appeared at frequent intervals a strange shape, representing as it seemed some deity or mythological hero. The body of this figure was bent from the waist, its right arm extended, the index finger pointing to the ground.

"It is the god of their chase—Ar-Toth, the Tracker," Daunt exclaimed. "Chenjovu was right; they were no Bantu savages who did this. See how deep and fine the graving is—like an intaglio on a gem. And there must be thousands of figures in the fresco. Whoever heard of the lapidary's methods applied on such a scale as this?"

He moved his finger over the surface of the stone as he spoke.

"There are lost arts," the Swede said. "I have never seen anything quite like these carvings. Surely we are in a temple."

They moved slowly across and round the cavern, pacing its dimensions. It proved to be an irregular polygon, having a maximum diameter of fifty-eight yards, and varying in height from about twelve to sixteen feet. The floor was divided into rectangular spaces, each of which had been dug out in the same way as the foundations of a house, and from these basements the stacked ivory rose in massive tiers, almost to the roof. A tolerably broad passage ran down the midst of the chamber, with narrower alleys set at right angles to it, so that a man could just walk comfortably between the pyramids of tusks on either side. These had been wedged and fitted into their places with deliberate care, each tusk interlocking with the next and holding it firmly in position, so that the whole pile stood stable and close knit, like a wall of masonry.

"It makes me think of that underground place in Paris, where the skulls are," Brackenham said. "You know—the catacombs. I wonder what this lot is worth as it stands."

"It is worth more than it will fetch, milord," the Swede answered drily, "because there is too much of it. Good tusks are worth ten to twelve shillings a pound

at the lake ports now, and very heavy ones thirteen perhaps, or even fourteen. But that is only for small lots. To sell a hill of ivory like this at top prices is not possible. It will upset all the markets. If you offer so much together you must take less for it."

"Quite right, Nicky, but we can afford to do that," Daunt said. "There won't be any need to haggle. Whatever the stuff fetches we shall do uncommonly well out of it. And now we had better postpone these agreeable speculations I think. I don't know how you two feel, but I'm about dog tired and it's nearly three o'clock."

The others assenting, they had begun to make their way out of the cave when the note of a horned owl sounded from somewhere outside and was repeated at several different points in the surrounding bush. At once the three men stopped. It was not the first cry that startled them, but the answering calls. For the horned owl is a solitary bird.

They were now in the neck of the tunnel. Tremenere, who was in front, made a sign to the others over his shoulder, and went on to the entrance alone. There, under the arching face of the cliff, he stood in deep shadow, but before him everything was brightly lit by the still unclouded moon, so that he saw at once the groups of dark figures creeping up. They had issued from the thickets of the plain and were now in full view on the bare slope beneath him; a large mob it seemed and fully armed, for the moonlight glittered on their spears as they moved.

At a glance the watcher knew that there could be no escape that way—or probably any way. He turned quickly and re-entered the tunnel, pushing his companions before him into the cave again.

"You were right after all, Nicky," he said. "They are coming."

The Swede was a brave man enough, and tight corners were nothing new to him, but his face changed a little now and he swore under his breath.

"Those were signal calls we heard then! My God! I feared so. But why are we standing here, my captain? If we are going to get out of this alive we must get out at once."

Tremenere shook his head.

"No use. It would be running straight into their arms."

"But if we stay we shall be trapped."

"We are trapped already," Daunt answered. "I did think of chancing it—trying a rush—but they are too near and too many. We should be speared as soon as we showed ourselves—and I don't intend to make them a free gift of our lives, quite."

Claussen shrugged his shoulders and loosened the pistol in his belt. The action was not lost on Brackenhams.

"We're just going to stick it out where we are then, eh?" he asked—"for as long as we can?"

Daunt made a gesture of impatience.

"Stop! Let me think," he exclaimed.

Sudden emergency acts with curiously different effect on different temperaments. It nearly always braces the heart, but it may paralyse judgment at the same time. Most men face unexpected death bravely: too many stupidly. A few find their greatest inspiration in the extremity of peril, and decide in its presence more readily and surely than at any other time.

In the short silence that followed Daunt's brain cleared with mechanical swiftness; his eyes brightened and hardened; his face assumed the indescribably eager, almost joyous, look so often seen in men of action at moments of imminent crisis. The others stood by passively. In a minute he lifted his head.

"Listen," he began. "We can't get out alive the way we came—that is certain. But I believe there must be another outlet from this cave somewhere, else the air wouldn't be so fresh. Besides, look how the flames of our lanterns flick about. That means a draught, and wherever there is a draught there is a second hole. If we can find it, and if it's big enough to let us through, we may give these rascals the slip yet."

Claussen looked dubious.

"I'm afraid there isn't time," he said. "But we can try it. It is our best chance perhaps."

"It is our only chance," Tremenere answered shortly.

The owl's mournful cry sounded again, this time almost at the mouth of the cave.

"Quick!" Daunt whispered, extinguishing his lantern. "Out with yours too, Brack. And you, Nicky, see if you can find a way through. Give us a whistle if you do. We won't let them force this passage sooner than we can help, I promise you."

Claussen disappeared into the darkness.

"Come here, Brack," Daunt went on, and put his hand on his friend's arm. "This is a bad business, old man, I'm afraid. God forgive me for having brought you into it. And now attend to what I'm going to say. You see the mouth of the tunnel that we came in by right in front of you. Well, these fellows will have to pass through it to get here. You know how narrow it is—only room for one man at a time. That's all in our favour. They won't be able to see a yard in front of them because they will be looking into the blackness of the cave; but we shall have our faces to such light as there is—and there's enough for what we have to do. You understand?"

"All right," Brackenham replied, rather envying the other's coolness. The certain knowledge that he was going to kill a man, or try to kill one, for the first time

in his life, and that within the next few minutes, made his heart beat strangely. He was no craven, but his hands, till now, had been clean of his fellows' blood.

"Stand there," Tremenere went on, "with your back against the rock—so. Don't move till you must; I shall be just opposite to you; and by the way, no pistols yet. We may want those later, and there won't be time to reload. Use your hunting knife—the point, not the edge, remember. And whatever you do, strike hard."

Through the chill darkness came the hesitating pad and shuffle of naked feet; then silence for a little, then some excited whispering and the sound of the footsteps again.

Brackenham kept his eyes steadily on the mouth of the tunnel. It showed against the pitch gloom with tolerable distinctness, as a spheroid of cloudy light. Presently a round, eclipsing, very black shadow projected itself cautiously into this luminous frame and stopped. Brackenham could make it out quite clearly. It was the head of a man, with neck extended, listening. Brackenham measured his distance from the head as well as he could. It was awfully close. A step to the right would bring the man within his reach; a step to the left and it would be Daunt's affair. As his fingers curled about the haft of his knife the figure moved to the left. Something else moved too—something bright and wonderfully swift. A curious smacking sound followed; then an unpleasant choking noise; the thud and slither of a collapsing body, and at once the mouth of the tunnel showed clear again.

Brackenham stood quite still. He felt no trace now of the compunction which had so moved him a few minutes since. That sinister shape which he had seen for an instant, with its stretched neck and simian pro-

file, that crouching poise and flat, soft tread, as of some lethal beast moving in darkness towards its prey, made him quiver with repulsion. The instinct of self-defence, the desire to strike, to rid the earth of what is noxious, took possession of him as it possesses a man who finds himself confronted with a wolf or a hyena. After all, sudden death, now that he had witnessed it, seemed quite a simple thing. How timely that blow of Daunt's had been! Would he be able to deal one like it himself, he wondered, as instant and merciful, when his moment came.

The man who had fallen had advanced alone—a scout sent forward to test the way. The others were still in the neck of the tunnel, waiting, uncertain what had happened. Several minutes passed, and some impatient whispering recommenced. Brackenham listened and watched with an intentness almost physically painful. For the moment every faculty in his frame seemed to arrest itself in the effort to give free play to those two supremely vital senses of sight and hearing. Even his breath was held as a marksman holds it when he is preparing to fire.

A shadow showed again at the tunnel mouth. It was much like the first in shape, with a peaked skull, and heavy brow ridges, and a jaw that stuck out grotesquely under a flat, contused nose. Brackenham found himself trying to remember the scientific name for a head of that type. It quite worried him, as trivial things do sometimes in moments of acute suspense. He had seen it in a book. It began with an A surely, or a P. Anthropoid? No. Pithecoïd? Something like that. Ah! Pithecanthropus, that was it! Pithecanthropus! Ape-man! and a very good name too.

This shadow remained stationary for some time as though the man who cast it was trying to see his way

in the blackness before him. Then, all at once, it gathered itself and leapt right into the cave. Brackenham had barely time to lift his arm when the misshapen creature was upon him. It stank. He struck at it as he would have struck at a serpent, with such a fury of repugnance that the hilt of his knife bruised the palm of his hand. The man screamed dreadfully as he fell.

In place of the silence that had followed the killing of the first-comer there arose now a great babel of voices in the passage.

"Steady, Brack!" Daunt called. "They heard that fellow cry out, and they know we're here now. They'll try and rush us I expect. Keep cool, and take them as they come."

Desperate as the defenders' situation seemed, two things at least were in their favour. They had always the terrible advantage of striking out of darkness into light against enemies in the reverse position, and, moreover, they were as two to one, since the assailants, whatever their numbers, could only issue singly from that narrow way. This tactical superiority had all the effect that Daunt had foreseen, but to keep it the white men must kill at every stroke and keep on killing. As long as the rush lasted they dare not miss a chance. To let one man into the cave would be to let in all, and therein lay their danger.

The harsh, continuous cries of the attackers, refracted and syncopated by the echoing angles of the vault, swelled into a storm of sound scarcely recognizable as human. It maddened Brackenham; he felt like a man in a nightmare. The all-pervading sense of warm blood spilling maddened him too. It was everywhere. His feet slipped in it. His right arm ran wet with it to the elbow. Mechanically he went on with what he had to do. It was like pole-axing. Thus far, no enemy had

passed him alive, but he was striking a little less cleanly now, a little less surely. His breath came thicker—once or twice he had nearly missed his man. A spear-head, stabbing blindly in the darkness, ripped the breast pocket out of his tunic—near thing that! He dirked the fellow next moment, but what was the good? As soon as one dropped there was always another in his place. If they kept it up like this they were bound to get through.

All at once, out of the back of the cavern, rose a clear call of hope, blown through the thin pipe of Nicky's shilling whistle. Brackenham could hardly trust his ears. It was as if the Magic Flute had sounded. Again the welcome summons came, threading shrilly through the grosser clamour about him, and with it Daunt's voice calling.

"Hullo, Brack! Hullo!"

"Hullo!"

"Pistols now," the voice went on. "We must drive them back, or they will break in on us directly we turn. Rapid fire—straight into the tunnel—and then run for it."

A score of shots tore through the crowded way. The foremost attackers fell directly. Those next behind, lashed by the screaming ricochets, recoiled wildly on their rearward comrades, and in a moment the neck of the passage was clear.

"Quick now!" Daunt called, returning his empty pistol to his belt. Nicky's whistle sounded again, and both men turning saw the glow of his lantern advancing to meet them.

"All right; this way," he cried; "keep close to me."

They passed into the utmost recesses of the cavern, and thence by a steeply inclined shaft into a gallery so low that they must enter it on their knees, so cramped that the encroaching walls bruised the flesh of their

hips and shoulders. It was here still intensely dark, yet as they crept they could feel the air moving faintly against their faces. Presently the way curved ; the light draught increased to a full breeze ; the sides of the passage shelved away, and the three beheld once more the open sky.

Outwearied as they were, they halted here only long enough to reload their pistols and straighten their limbs. The moon, as they saw to their relief, was now partly obscured by a drift of stratified cloud. From the lip of the outlet an echelon of footholds, originally natural, but enlarged and completed, as it seemed, by human agency, led deviously down the scarp of the cliff into the plain beneath. Here, under cover of the bush, they felt tolerably secure, yet to go back by the way they had come was not to be risked, for the night was now nearly spent. It was, in fact, full dawn of a fresh windy morning when they reached their camp at last. The sentry stared at them in amazement, as well he might, at their clothes all torn and filthy, at their haggard faces, and the unwashed blood on their hands.

No, he had seen nothing. Nothing had happened. The camp had not been disturbed at all.

CHAPTER XXI

ONCE AND FOR ALL

SENHOR (he was very particular about the "Senhor") Miguel Joao da Silva Xavier lay on his back in the full heat of the African noon. The prepotent half of him being native, he had no need to worry about sunstroke and things like that. Physically, he was very much at his ease, but the brain that lay behind those slanting brows had been working feverishly ever since his men had come in that morning. They had got the ivory marked down at last, that was all right anyhow, but the other part of his plan had woefully miscarried. To think that those damned niggers had the white men trapped and let them go filled him with unendurable rage. Rot them, and their cock-and-bull story of two superhuman presences striking, unseen, with arms like thunderbolts. Ah! if he, Miguel Joao da Silva Xavier had been there he would have acted very differently. He would just have forced his way up to the cursed Englishmen in a couple of strides—one! two!—like that; not given the beggars a chance. He would have ripped their throats out. Yes; but he had preferred to stay behind—the bravado in him wilted at the thought. He hated Daunt Tremenere so that he would rather have had his life than all the treasure in that cavern; but he feared him desperately too. Say what you liked, men like that, aristocrats, had something

compelling about them, something one could not define or clearly understand, something that daunted men like him, Miguel Xavier, to the marrow. The black blood in him cringed whenever he thought of those clear, steady eyes, that contemptuous voice. Had he been black all through it would not have mattered ; he would have felt no sense of humiliation. But the other half of him, the half that came from his jealous Latin ancestry, raged against the negroid weakness in his veins, and would not let him rest.

What was he going to do now ? Sit tight and starve the swine out. It was the safest course, the course he would have preferred, but it would take time, and he could not hold his savage followers together much longer. They were beginning to grumble already—eager to get back to their crops and their womenfolk. It was like that with natives. Something decisive must be attempted soon or they would slip away from him.

He cast about for a convenient tree, and springing into its branches as soundlessly as a cat, beheld his enemy's defences on the bare slope opposite. He could see them quite distinctly, and he did not like the look of them. This was no mere traveller's camp carelessly pitched and loosely protected. The earthworks were deep and solid. The ground in front, inclining gently towards the surrounding forest, at an angle peculiarly favourable to musketry, had been stripped for two hundred yards, and was commanded on the flanks by a couple of small bastions. Against trained riflemen, as he knew the defenders to be, such a place could not be carried without heavy loss of life. Well—what did that matter ? He could better afford to lose lives than to lose time. Had he not three hundred men against thirty—ten to one ? They were only spearmen, it was true, but formidable fellows at close quarters, quick

with their great stabbing assegais. A sudden rush at dawn, almost in the dark—that was the way! They would only have two hundred yards to go, and he had enough Cape brandy left to dose the leaders liberally. The more he thought about it the more confident he felt. Talk about the effect of musketry!—damn the musketry! How were thirty men going to stop ten times their number? Let them shoot as fast and straight as they liked, they couldn't pull down those odds much in a couple of hundred yards. The rush was bound to go through—and not a man of the garrison would be alive ten minutes later.

Meanwhile, unconscious that they had been thus mentally disposed of already, the objects of his attention were sitting quite cheerfully at lunch.

"This is going to be a play in two acts," Daunt remarked, pouring out his coffee. "What we had last night was number one."

"Oh! and what do you suppose is going to happen next?" Brackenham asked.

"Well, that is not very difficult to guess, is it? Here am I and there is Xavier. Both of us know where the ivory is now, and neither can get away with it while the other is alive. So he must break us, or we must break him; and as we have taken a lot of trouble to fortify this little camp of ours on the most approved principles, I intend to sit here quietly until he makes a move. I only hope he will do it soon.—What do you think, Nicky?"

"I think what I have always thought," the Swede answered. "You remember what I said, that if anything was going to happen it would happen after we found the ivory. Well, the ivory has been found. Manchichi's people will not stay in the woods much longer now to eat roots and berries; why should they? They tried to kill us last night, and very soon they will try again."

Daunt laughed. "I think so too," he said; "but now listen to me, both of you. I'm going to explain to the askari just what they are to do when these fellows come on, and you must help me rub it in. You know what native troops are, always itching to loose off their rifles. If they have a weak point it is their fire discipline, and we can't afford to have any random shooting now. I don't want this rush to be checked too soon, remember. I don't want it to be turned. I want it to come right on till we can crush it flat."

That curiously eager look was in his eyes again. He paused for a moment and, mounting the fire-step of the trench, pointed over the parapet to the open ground beyond.

"Do you see that bit of thorn bush and the tall palm in line with it away to the left?—well, there mustn't be a shot fired till the rush reaches the space between them. It's all soft ground there, though nobody would think so to look at it. The green stuff on top is only duckweed, and if you tread on it, it lets you in knee deep pretty nearly. As soon as the attack gets to that point it's bound to slow down, and the range is just over eighty yards. Any number of natives can be stopped within that distance if the shooting isn't absolutely wild. But as I said before, these rascals have not got to be stopped only—they must be blotted out. We want to be done with them once and for all."

Ever so slowly the purple blackness of night paled into grey; more quickly the grey flushed to rose. A heavy dew drenched the leafage of the trees and bowed the tops of the feathery grasses as one dark figure after another took its stand at the forest's edge. A jay chattered; a covey of francolin partridges sprang into the air, whirring and crowing. Inside the little fort the garrison stood silently to arms.

The attackers began to run forward, their bodies bent, instantly expectant of a volley, but no sound came from the dark trenches, nothing stirred there. Fifty yards!—eighty! the fort seemed as if deserted. A hundred!—a hundred and twenty! The leading spear-men sank calf-deep in mire; a bugle sounded sharply, and was followed next instant by a crash of musketry that made the air quiver.

Even in that uncertain light the struggling figures in the bog, eighty yards away, showed too plainly to be missed. It seemed incredible that thirty rifles could work such havoc, but the modern magazine, in the hands of men who know how to use it, is a terrible arm. The rush wavered, stopped, and began to recoil. It was on the point of breaking into rout when a man, who had taken no active part in the attack, but seemed to come up suddenly from rearward of it, threw himself like a madman among the fugitives. His gestures showed plainly that he was trying to rally them. It was Xavier! Daunt could hardly trust his eyes. Xavier, the craven, divested for once of his fears, setting his endeavour thus manfully to overcome the weakness of others! Xavier, the despised half-breed, transformed momentarily, by what strange access of rage, into this heroic presence; this Berserk thrusting into the thick of peril! For a moment the result of his intervention seemed in doubt. The human ebb bore him back, shouting and gesticulating, but soon his vehement purpose prevailed; the broken ranks gathered themselves, turned, and came on again, and this time it seemed as if nothing could stop them. Losing men at every stride, in face of a fusillade so intense that it sounded almost like machine-gun fire, they forced the passage of the bog at last. The ground beneath them was here firm and level, the trenches not sixty yards away. Already the foremost assailants, racing at full speed, were lifting their assegais for the

shock. It seemed impossible that, in the few seconds remaining, the storm of lead could beat down the storm of steel.

If there is a time above all others for keeping your head it is when a rush of savages is within fifty paces of you, but it is not a very easy thing to do. Just when the fate of the whole garrison turned on the maintenance of its steadiness for a few moments longer ; just when every bullet was worth its weight in gold, Tremenere saw, to his dismay, that the askari were getting rattled, shooting loosely, and—of all faults then the most fatal—shooting high. To call out to them was useless, his voice could not carry through that tumult ; yet something must be done on the instant. There was no time to think ; it was touch and go anyhow. In the hope that he might rally his men yet by placing himself where all could see him, he sprang on to the parapet of the trench.

Xavier had now so outstripped his nearest followers that he showed in mid-field as a detached figure moving with furious energy. A strange sense of exaltation possessed him. The solid ground seemed to fly back beneath his stride, like insubstantial air. The clamour of the battle touched him to no fear ; rather to a sort of megalomania, as of a man riding the whirlwind. He laughed as he ran, his breast swelling. Every one was looking at him, wondering at him ; he wondered at himself. And then, all at once, the black trenches opened under his feet. He lifted his head and saw the figure of Daunt Tremenere close before him.

If there are any who read Walter Scott in these days they will recall what happened at the combat of the North Inch, when Conachar found himself confronted by Hal of the Wynd. The half-breed was in the same case now. In that supreme moment all the crazy exaltation that had sustained him so far went out of

his heart, and left him for what he was. Almost within leaping distance of the trench, he put his hands before his eyes and stopped, as though the face of Gorgon Medusa had turned him into stone.

To halt then was to call out to death and embrace it. The defenders saw his chin drop, saw him falter and put his hand to his side. So for an instant he remained ; then, as the charging spearmen drew abreast of him, he flung his pistol into the air and, falling heavily upon his knees, slid forward and downward to the earth.

Discipline was invented because the natural behaviour of men in masses is notoriously at the mercy of contagious emotion. That is true at all times, and it is especially true of action in arms. The attackers, who had been straining at their leader's heels in the full flush of warlike ardour a minute since, lost courage utterly when they saw him hesitate and fall. The rush had been pressed so far now that it could not stop ; its own physical momentum swept it on, but there was no longer any spirit or cohesion in it. Instead of charging home the foremost spearmen, flinging their assegais blindly, swung away from the trenches before them as a nervous horse swerves from a stiff fence. It was a fatal lead. In a moment the whole disordered crowd, following, turned flankwise to the opposing riflemen till, lashed with fire on every side, they broke into headlong rout.

Without waiting for orders the excited askari sprang over the parapets uttering cheer on cheer. The luckless fugitives crowded back into the bog. Brackenham, looking on, felt suddenly sick. The pursuit of beaten and terrified men with the bayonet is not a pleasant thing to watch.

" Good God, Daunt ! " he protested after a few

minutes, "surely they have had enough? Won't you call the askari off?"

Tremenere, who had been wounded on the scalp by a flying spear, wiped the blood out of his eyes and surveyed the field coldly. As a soldier he had been taught that a routed enemy should be pressed to the uttermost; besides, these fellows were no better than cutthroats. Yet they had been punished so severely now that, whatever happened, the expedition had nothing more to fear from them. And, after all, they had only acted as the instruments of a stronger will.

"All right," he answered, after a little. "Get hold of a bugler if you can."

A moment later the piercing notes of the recall echoed over the field. The askari were widely scattered by this time and racing hard for blood, but they had learnt long since that Daunt Tremenere was not a leader to be trifled with. The non-commissioned officers and the men nearest to them stopped at once. Only a few of the younger soldiers still held on their way, until, the peremptory bugle sounding again, they too turned back, half abashed, half reluctant, as rated hounds turn from a forbidden line.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ARROW OF THE ARCHER

IT was still quite early. The sun was rising in a flood of chrome behind the feathery tree tops. To the tumult and carnage of action had succeeded the mellow stillness of the tropic morning. At times some of the stricken wretches who lay under the edge of the parapet, moved feebly with inarticulate cries; otherwise there was nothing to recall the warlike scene so lately enacted. All Nature wore an aspect of profound peace. Even the little pied grass-finches were singing their matins as if nothing particular had happened.

The three white men looked at each other.

"What about the wounded?" Brackenham asked helplessly.

"We'll do the best we can for them," Daunt said, "but I wish we had a doctor. I never expected anything like this. There is Xavier too—he may be alive still. Come, we must bring him in."

A few minutes later the half-caste lay within the shelter of his enemy's defences. His eyes were closed; his mouth open; his limbs huddled loosely. A great stain of blood had congealed on his shirt and lay there, dry and dark, like a splash of tar. But the heart beneath it was beating still.

Daunt's face changed as he beheld the pitiful figure. An hour ago this had been a man, strong of limb, keen

of brain, energetic, vindictive, one whose hostility was a factor to be seriously reckoned. But ah ! this broken, bleeding thing, so impotent, so very near to death—let its pain be eased and let it go.

He turned to Brackenham.

"Get some warm water—quickly. And bring bandages, Nicky. You know where to find them. I'm afraid we can't do much for him."

As he spoke the prostrate body stirred.

"Badly hurt, aren't you?" Daunt asked, kneeling beside the improvised stretcher.

"Oh ! go to hell !" the man retorted, opening slowly his long dark eyes. "Can't you see I'm dying?"

"Yes, I see it," the other answered simply. "I don't want to worry you, but we can make you a little more comfortable perhaps."

For some time the moribund lay without further speech or motion, but when at last his wounds had been dressed he looked at Daunt again.

"I was a bit sharp with you just now," he remarked apologetically. "I'm very weak you see. You don't mind, eh?"

"Of course not."

"I didn't know what I was saying."

"All right—that's nothing. Just keep quiet."

"Well, but will you do something for me, sir ? For a dying man ?"

His tone had become fawning.

Daunt hesitated in spite of himself. "What is it ?" he asked.

"I want to see my servant Zarafi. He is sure to be in the bush somewhere. He always keeps near me."

"Why do you want him now ?" Claussen inquired.

"Only to give him a message to my mother."

"Well, but how are we to find him ?"

The half-caste looked at Tremenere again.

"Don't send any one to fetch him, sir. He will only run away. Let me call him. If he hears my voice he will come."

Again Daunt hesitated, though he would have been puzzled to say why.

"What is the matter?" Brackenham asked impatiently. "It is little enough he is asking of us surely. Let him call his servant if he can."

A faint smile crossed Xavier's face.

"If I can," he repeated; and raising himself with difficulty on his elbow he uttered loudly the peculiar cry of the horned owl. On the instant, with the fidelity of an echo, it was answered from the woods. Brackenham started. The smile reappeared on the half-breed's face. He threw back his head, breathed deeply, and yelped twice, like a jackal. "Now watch," he said. "What do you see?"

"A boy!" Daunt answered.

"An ape!" cried Brackenham.

"No, by God!" Claussen exclaimed. "It's a man!"

At the sound of the jackal's bark a droll little figure had arisen from behind a clump of ferns and was now approaching the stockade. It was that of a full grown savage not much more than four feet high, naked to the waist, but having his nether limbs girt about with a thick kilt of plaited grass.

"How long his arms are," Brackenham cried, as the singular creature drew nearer; "and look at the hair on his knuckles! Dashed if I don't believe it's a monkey after all."

He laughed as he spoke.

"Take care," muttered the Swede anxiously. "That is a Congo dwarf. I know them. They are all bad and treacherous, those pygmy people."

"But he has no weapons," Brackenham answered.

By this time the little man had reached the stockade

and was standing outside while Xavier addressed him from within, in some strange tongue. The half-caste spoke with feverish animation, repeating certain words so often that even the three Europeans noticed their recurrence, although, of course, quite ignorant of their meaning. From time to time he pointed his finger at Tremenere, and as often as he did this the dwarf gazed fixedly at Daunt as though taking stock of his appearance.

"Why do you do that?" the latter asked.

"I am only telling him that you have been good to me; that you have dressed my wounds. Now I have spoken, and Zarafi can go."

He added a few words in the vernacular and the pygmy turned away, but had scarcely gone ten paces, when he slipped his hand under his kilt and wheeled round again.

Claussen, who had been watching narrowly, grabbed his rifle and uttered a shout of warning. Zarafi had plucked a short bow from under his belt and was drawing it full against the tall figure of Daunt Tremenere. Instinctively, Brackenham flung himself forward, covering his friend's body with his own. A string twanged shrilly, and something dark and slender came humming over the barricade. Brackenham snapped his teeth.

"Damn it! I'm hit!" he cried. "Look out! He's going to shoot again."

Zarafi was, in fact, fitting a second arrow, but before he could let it go, Daunt and Claussen fired simultaneously, and at the double report the little man screamed, threw out his arms, and fell, as though struck by lightning.

The interval between Nicky's warning cry and the sound of the two rifles had occupied no more than a few seconds, but it had sufficed to throw the whole stockade

into confusion. The half-caste was cursing frightfully. The askari had run to their arms again, not knowing what to expect. Brackenham stood by, looking rather bewildered, the fragile dart still quivering in his forearm, like a live thing.

"It's nothing at all," he explained, as Claussen approached him. "The skin is hardly broken. Why, a footy little splinter like that wouldn't hurt a rabbit." He looked at it as he spoke, and laughed. The Swede looked too, but without laughing. His brow grew suddenly dark as, with a deft movement of his big fingers, he plucked the arrow forth and cast it from him sharply, disgustedly, as if it had been some noxious asp. In another moment he had torn a narrow strip of linen from the short sleeve, and bound it tightly above the wound.

"Now," said he, "hold out your arm."

"What do you mean?" Brackenham asked.

"I mean what I say. Hold out your arm," the other repeated sharply; but just then Tremener, who had been looking on, shouldered the Swede aside.

"Get out of the way, Nicky," he cried. "Ah! let me do it, man. He's my friend." And seizing Brackenham's arm, he bent his head swiftly and put his lips to the wound.

"Good God!" exclaimed the patient, awakened at last to some notion of what was toward, "I won't have it, Daunt! Let go!" And he would have wrenched himself free, but Claussen, watching, caught and held him with iron strength, while Tremener sucked and spat, and sucked again.

When it was finished and Brackenham had gone to his tent, the half-caste called to Daunt.

"Stop a moment. I have only a short time now, and I want to tell you with my last breath how I hate you. If Zarafi had shot you as I bade him, and as he would have done but for that other who ran between, I should

die happy. Ah well ! It is something that your friend is killed. I hope he is very dear to you."

Daunt looked at the man with eyes of loathing.

"I can hardly trust myself to speak to you," he answered, "but I want you to know that your treachery has wholly failed. My friend is not killed as you imagine. He is scarcely hurt. It may be that the arrow was poisoned, but his wound has been sucked—and it was a very slight one."

The half-caste uttered a fearful laugh. It shook him so that the blood ran out of his side again.

"Only one moment more," he said weakly. "Remember well what I am going to tell you now. The poison on that arrow is like no other poison in the world. A pin-prick will carry enough of it to kill an ox and you can never get rid of it—never. If you drained every drop of blood from your friend's body you would find it in his bones. And there is another thing ; it is a slow poison—very slow sometimes. It depends. I have seen men die from it in a few days or a few weeks and I have seen them die after many months ; but none recover. So I cannot tell when your friend's time will come. Only this I know, that he is doomed at this instant as surely as I am doomed, who have perhaps ten minutes to live."

He turned his face aside as he spoke and drew the blanket over his shoulders like a man who has said his say.

That night Daunt took the Swede aside and told him what Xavier had said.

"Well ; there is a risk of course," Claussen answered, "but I don't think it is a great one. I think we were too quick for that. In a day or two we shall see ; but I am very hopeful."

"A day or two ? Yet this man spoke of many months perhaps—and of a poison that never fails."

“Ah! you must not heed such lies. The fellow was a boaster and black-hearted like all cross-breeds. He spoke out of malice, being helpless. Listen, my captain! I know the Congo from end to end. I have hunted and traded with the tribes there since I was a boy. I know all their poisons, and they are many and bad. But a poison that runs through blood and bone and cannot be sucked, that waits for months and always kills at last—no, believe me there is none like that.”

CHAPTER XXIII

IN ALL TIME OF OUR WEALTH

SOME rumours of fighting in the hinterland had found its way to Zanda ; mere desultory talk, untraceable as to its origin and confused in its details, like all native hearsay. Otherwise Sir John had been without news of the expedition for nearly two months, and his interest in its fortunes was beginning to be tinged with uneasiness, when a cipher telegram reached him from the officer commanding at Fort Felix. It read thus :—

“ Confidential message received this morning by runner from Tremenere. Full stop. Message begins. Expedition successful. Brackenham and self returning. Claussen remains behind to recruit carriers. Expect to reach Fort Felix about 15th. Repeat to Governor. Full stop. Message ends.”

The old gentleman's eyes snapped as he put the slip of paper into his pocket.

“ Expedition successful, eh ! ” he repeated to himself slowly. “ What a fellow it is ! He doesn't waste words. Capital news as far as it goes, but it leaves one rather hungry for particulars. I wonder what has happened exactly. Somehow I can't help thinking that a good deal has happened. Well, I must possess my soul in patience till they arrive, I suppose.”

He turned to a card on his desk which showed the sailing dates of the lake steamers. The next passenger boat was not due at Fort Felix till the 28th—a fortnight's delay. Sir John reflected for a moment, and struck the telephone bell sharply.

"Hullo! Give me eighteen, will you? Senior Naval Officer. That you, Roden? Look here! Tremenere is on his way to Fort Felix—expects to get there about the 15th, and there isn't a passenger steamer till the 28th. I want a gunboat to call and bring him and Brackenham down directly they arrive. You can spare one, I suppose. What? *Waterwitch*? Very well. As quickly as possible, you understand. Thanks. Good-bye."

Of the several diminutive gunboats forming the lake flotilla, *Waterwitch* was the smallest and the most heavily armed for her size; consequently, also the liveliest in her motions—an obstreperous little thing in fact, but desperately fast. By the time our travellers reached Fort Felix she was already anchored in the bay. A tearing wind blew outside and, even under the shelter of the enclosing headlands, the tiny vessel rocked to her sponsons in the tumultuous cross swell. Tremenere recognized her at once.

"Why, it's *Waterwitch*!" he exclaimed, "and a wet boat she is too in a sea like this. We're in for a ducking, Brack. However, that's a deal better than kicking our heels here for the next fortnight."

Truly, he was in no mood to grumble about trifles just then. Everything had come right at last. He had accomplished all and more than he had undertaken, and the knowledge that success had been achieved in the teeth of adverse circumstances made it doubly grateful to his self-willed soul. Best of all, Brackenham's slight wound, which had caused him more anxiety, at first, than he would have cared to admit, had

healed so satisfactorily that there seemed no sort of ground for any further misgivings on that score.

The *Waterwitch*, running southward at a pace that kept her decks awash the whole way, landed them at the other end of the lake within thirty hours. The wildest rumours of their experiences in the hinterland had everywhere preceded them, and Daunt found some difficulty in dealing with the eager crowd of questioners who overran the little ship almost before she had time to come to anchor. His uncommunicative temper was well known, and the hardest gossipers, ordinarily, stood in some awe of him, but public curiosity was now too strong to be denied.

"I should humour them a bit if I were you," the lieutenant of the gunboat advised. "They'll be off fast enough, as soon as they have something authentic to tell their pals. Nuisance, I know, but it's the best way to get rid of them."

So, with rather a bad grace, Daunt submitted at last to his inquisitors.

Had there been a battle? There had been some fighting. No; it was not true that Nicky Claussen had been killed. He was perfectly well. Was Lord Brackenhams mortally wounded? Nothing of the kind—a mere arrow prick, that had healed in a couple of days. He was below now packing his traps. Had Captain Tremenere been hurt himself? Very slightly—just a flesh cut on the scalp. He would be obliged if his hearers would contradict any exaggerated tales about casualties. Beyond a few askari there had been no loss of life on their side. Yes; Xavier was dead. Yes; they had found a lot of ivory. No; he could not say what it was worth. He could not go into details at all.

At Zanda, of course, he had to go into them. The Governor listened in silence, putting a brief question now and then, blinking incessantly over his long cigar.

"What did I tell you?" he said at last. "The escort came in handy after all you see."

Daunt shrugged his shoulders.

"About Brackenham," Sir John continued presently. "There seems no cause for anxiety judging from what you have told me, but he had better see a doctor as soon as possible—just to be on the safe side, you know."

"That has been done already," Daunt answered. "I took him to Phipps myself, directly we got here."

"I see. Quite right. And what did Phipps say?"

"Oh; he was very reassuring. He believes that if any complications were going to follow they would have shown themselves unmistakably, long before now. In fact, he gives Brackenham a clean bill of health. I told him what Xavier had threatened of course, but he is convinced that there is nothing in it. Claussen thinks the same."

"So do I," Sir John agreed. "A man like Xavier would threaten anything. Still I am glad to have Phipps's opinion. Well, everything seems to have come right for you at last, doesn't it? What are you going to do with your treasure, by the way? Haven't made up your mind perhaps."

"Oh; as to that my mind was made up long ago," Daunt answered. "I didn't undertake this venture for the sake of profit in the ordinary sense. I had a definite purpose."

The Governor smiled. "Yes; you generally have," he said. "Well, it's been a wonderful story. You've had some luck, but not more than you deserve. I suppose you will live at home altogether after this. Why not go into Parliament, Tremener? You could help us enormously there."

Daunt shook his head.

"But you will need something to occupy you, now that

you've left this service," Sir John persisted. "What are you going to do with your life?"

A shadow crossed the other's face. He had no answer to that question. For six months past he had bent his mind solely to the immediate business which had brought him to Africa. Its difficulties and responsibilities had been welcome as a relief from more troublous preoccupations. But now, at last, the expedition was at an end. Only its success remained. He was going to be a very rich man—richer perhaps than his forbears had ever been; going to redeem the Locksbrook mortgages, going to get rid of Bolderson. The great grey house would be his again. Yes—but what was the good of that now? As matters stood with him, how could he live there? The park gates of Locksbrook and Bracy were barely thirty miles apart. Could he endure to be so near to Marcia as that and never see her? Besides, if he lived at Locksbrook, or indeed in England at all, he would have to see her. Brackenham would expect him to visit them as usual, and that must not be.

"I don't know what I shall do—where I shall go," he said, a little irritably. "I haven't thought it out yet."

Sir John felt puzzled. The note of impatience in the other's voice did not escape him. He saw that a conflict of some kind was taking place in this man's mind, but he could not divine its nature. Was it possible that Tremenere, in his affluence, could be contemplating a life of self-indulgent idleness, and was ashamed to admit it? He so fit for endeavour, whose days had always been so full of purpose? Surely not! Yet he was young, and the test of sudden prosperity was a hard one. What was it the Litany said? "*In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth.*" He leant forward and put his hand on his companion's arm.

"I'm an old man, Tremenere," he said. "May I speak freely to you?"

For a moment Daunt's habitual reserve asserted itself. He hesitated and looked searchingly in the Governor's face. What he saw there seemed to reassure him.

"I shall be grateful if you will, sir," he answered.

"Very well," Sir John went on. "What I have to say is this. I've always been a believer in you, and I am a pretty good judge of men—colonial governors have to be. I've always thought you could go very far in the world if you liked. You have all the natural equipment for it, and now happy chance has brought you money too. Do you realize what that means? Mind, I'm not one of those who think that money can work miracles. It will never help a fool or a craven to anything worth having—nothing will. But it gives men of strength and vision the only help they need; a clear start, a chance to push out of the ruck before their powers begin to fail."

"Oh well! I don't mean to loaf," Daunt interrupted. "I shall try for something."

"Yes; but remember only two things in life are really worth having. Any man of my age would tell you the same. Of course there are lots of merely agreeable things too, and I don't despise them either. One can pick them up as one goes along. I've no quarrel with the world, Tremener. I've warmed both hands at the fire. But when one gets near the end, and can look back steadily, one sees that, of the things that really count, there are just these two."

"Yes?" said Daunt.

"One is a thing that men don't speak about to each other," the Governor said, "and the other is power, Tremener—any kind of power. But for a man like you—listen! When I spoke about a parliamentary career just now I was in earnest. When I said you could help us in that way I meant it. We need a spokesman

in the House who knows the African colonies at first hand ; and you might be a Cabinet Minister some day."

Daunt laughed.

"Oh ! I don't mean to flatter you," Sir John continued. "I don't suggest you're a genius, but there is precious little of that in modern politics. Believe me, you could hold your own easily enough among the men who direct public affairs in these days. They are very ordinary people for the most part, when one gets close up to them. I'm not throwing stones, mind. Most of them are conscientious enough according to their lights, and very clever too in a sense. But its mostly knack and patter and parliamentary fencing tricks. What we want at home is some one who understands the stark facts about colonial administration and will force the Government to face them. Now you could do that. You've had just the kind of practical experience that the professional politicians lack. You've seen a British dependency in the making—seen it on the spot. You've taken a hand in the spade work. Of course, this is only a small colony and not a very important one. Still, *ex pede Herculem*, you know."

Daunt looked at the old man curiously. "I should hardly have thought Namasiland needed any champion at home as long as you are here," he remarked. "I had a notion that you stood very well with Downing Street."

"Ah ; in a personal sense perhaps, but that is not what I mean. Look here, Tremenere ! I've served under five Secretaries of State—Lord Chippenham now and Knapp before him, and then Martley and Berrington, and the old Duke of Cardiff back in the 'nineties. They've all been most considerate chiefs to me personally, very pleasant to work with and so on, and I could have had promotion long ago if I had cared to leave this country. I hope I'm not ungrateful for all that ; but doing business with them is quite a different

thing. I tell you it's been heart-breaking sometimes. Look at the Trans-Namasa railway scheme, for instance. This little colony can never go ahead till it has that line. I've been trying for ten years to get it sanctioned, because it means everything to us. Why, it would be worth while to run it at a loss if we had to, but there would be no loss. I know that because I'm on the spot ; but at home they don't know and I can't convince them. They won't build the line themselves and they won't let me get it built, because we should have to guarantee the debenture interest and sinking fund. That's just a typical instance, but it's been the same with so many things. I know they mean well, and I think they like me and trust me too, in a way—but then they are so far off, and I'm not a good hand at dispatch writing. What was it old Chenjovu said of them ? ' Rulers of lands they never saw, saying thus and thus it shall be done.' It's quite true. Of course, they have the Treasury to contend with. Well ; I hope I'm not unreasonable—but I love this country, Tremenere."

There was passion in his voice as he said it. The penetrating charm of wild Africa is a thing that must be experienced, not a thing that can be explained or written down. Even those who feel it most deeply cannot tell you in what it consists. Its source is hardly in anything intrinsically pleasurable—rather, as I have thought sometimes, in that strange Pauline capacity for delight in hardship, which is the mark of the born pioneer. Certain, at least, it is that the men whom Africa has treated the most capriciously and pitilessly, the men she has consumed, the men she has broken, have always loved her best. So, strangely prescient in the plenitude of his devotion, Clapperton wrote of her—" *Te videam suprema mihi quum venerit hora.*" So Livingstone, than whom none ever endured more for her sake, asked, with dying breath, that his heart might remain in her embrace

for ever. Therefore they took it from his breast at last and laid it under the wild fig tree at Chitambo, so that his true resting-place is there to this day, in the bright sun and clean wind, and not where his empty body lies, and sightseers gape and whisper, among the storied shadows of Westminster.

Like these greater men, John Garth had given to Africa the best that was in him ; all the ardour of his youth, all the strength of his prime. In his more errant and adventurous years he had gloried as they did, "in journeyings often—in perils by the heathen—perils in the wilderness—in watchings often—in fastings often." And the cares of government, for which he had since exchanged the physical toils of travel, were beginning at last to complete what wounds and fever had begun.

He was now sixty-two. In Europe, where affairs of state are directed by septuagenarian ministers, men in the early sixties are scarcely accustomed to think of themselves as old ; but that is because the mistress they serve is old herself. Madam Europa's blood has begun to thicken. She is growing prudish and comfort loving, increasingly concerned about her banking account, and disinclined to romantic adventure of any kind. But Africa is young and wayward ; a beautiful savage in whose burning embrace the strength of men is consumed before their time. And when the powers of her devotees begin to fail she is merciless. She never softens their dismissal, never bows them out from strenuous service to dignified sinecure, with smiles and compliments, and feigned reluctance and munificent rewards. There are no easy-chairs in her antechambers.

None knew that better than John Garth. He could carry on for a few years yet, but already the end was in sight ; the time when he would have to exchange this warm, active present, with all its pleasing anxieties, for the impotence of pensioned retirement. That, in itself,

no more disturbed him than the approach of anything else that was inevitable. But here, before him, was a man still young, armed at all points, the inheritor of an ancient name, the master now of great wealth, a man who understood Africa almost as perfectly as he understood her himself, who loved her almost as well, who could serve her, if he would, more effectually than John Garth had ever had it in his power to do—a man who must not be lost to her cause if a word in season could prevent it.

Daunt saw clearly what was in the other's mind and knew, as surely, what his own answer must be. Yet it was with manifest hesitation that he spoke at last.

"I think I am nearly as fond of this country as you are, sir," he said, "but I'm sorry—I mean I'm afraid I couldn't help in the way you suggest—by going into Parliament and so on. In the first place, it's not in my line at all. Everything there is done by compromise, and I hate eating my convictions. Besides, I'm a poor hand at talking—most soldiers are. You see, it is not merely that politics are distasteful to me. I wouldn't shirk them if I thought I could really help you and the colony in that way; but one can't expect to go far in any career unless one has some sort of natural instinct for it. That is one side of the question. The other is that taking up political work would mean settling down in England altogether, and I'm not prepared to do that at present. I can't explain the reason, sir, even to you. Yet I will ask you to believe that it is a sufficient one."

Sir John sat back in his chair, "Well; that clears the ground at any rate," he remarked quietly. The first objection he would have combated if it had stood alone, but the second plainly was beyond his reach.

"Some woman I expect," he said to himself. "I might have guessed as much."

Daunt watched the old face remorsefully. He hated to refuse this man.

"Believe me, I would help if I could," he said. "If there was any other way."

The Governor rose and began to pace the room thoughtfully.

"Well; there is a possible alternative," he said at last. "Perhaps you won't consider it worth your while now; in fact, I hadn't thought of mentioning it at all, because I assumed you would be returning to England for good, you see. But if you don't mean to do that——"

"Yes?" said Daunt, as the other paused.

"Would you care to come back to us, do you think? To work for the colony here, since you cannot serve her at home?"

Tremenere looked rather puzzled.

"Come back?" he repeated. "Do you mean officially—as a soldier?"

"Officially, yes; but not as a soldier—at least not primarily, though it's a soldier's job too, to some extent. I'll explain as shortly as I can. The fact is, Tremenere, that the administration of this country is getting to be rather too much for one man. Office work has doubled in the last few years. You can see for yourself how I am tied down here at Zanda now. I can't deal properly with the northern half of the colony because it's too far away, and I haven't time to travel about and look after everything personally as I used to do. But the northern districts are difficult districts; they can't be left to run themselves. I want some one on the spot there—some one who can be trusted with the fullest authority. I want a Lieutenant-Governor in the north."

He paused and lit a cigar.

"The thing has been discussed with the Colonial Office already," he went on, "and they have agreed, so now it only remains to find the right man. He must be a man I can depend on through thick and thin;

a man who knows the northern districts well; and above all, one who understands the Angoni, and can keep them within bounds. Oh! I daresay you could do better for yourself elsewhere. It would have been worth your while a year ago, but everything is open to the rich, and I quite appreciate that it isn't much to offer you now—an appointment like that."

He stopped and looked fixedly at his companion.

"But if there is such a man in Namasiland, Tremenere, you are he."

Daunt looked up and the eyes of the two men met.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "Let me think."

The Governor nodded and turned to some papers on his desk. The room seemed to become curiously still. A white-faced clock on the mantelpiece ticked faintly; the murmuring voices of pigeons rose from the garden outside. There was no other sound. The blinds had been drawn against the afternoon heat, and through the filtered light that passed them, Daunt saw again, with faithful memory, the vision of the Angoniland plateau.

Once more he felt, on cheek and brow, the hale breath of the dawn wind, crisp with dissolving frost. The sun drew bright above the well-remembered hills, passed in splendour through the middle heaven. Before him stretched the ragged cedar forests, the bloom-flushed meadows, the clustering huts with their high-peaked thatches. There were the round, naked children, playing in the dust, as he had so often seen them; the laughing women with their water-jars, coming and going about the wells.

The chatter ceased. The moorland storks sailed in to roost. A mist of wood smoke lapped and drifted. Forth came the soft-winged hunters of night: ghostly owls with fierce golden eyes, fantastic wavering goat-suckers. Forth too came the lengthening and deepening

shadows, coalescing imperceptibly into a smooth, intense gloom, all fretted with the glow of fire and star.

Of a sudden the figure of an armed sentinel showed darkly against these shining arcs. His plumed head-piece and great oval shield marked him for an Angoni Zulu.

"Habari?" he called, raising his spear in salute. "How is it?"

The soldier stirred in his chair. His eyes were wide open.

"Jéma," he answered aloud. "It is well."

The Governor stared for a moment, leant forward with a laugh, and touched him on the knee.

"Dreaming?" he asked.

Daunt looked rather confused.

"I suppose I must have been," he answered. "I don't know what made me. I was thinking of Angoniland."

"Well?" said the Governor.

"I'm very grateful for your offer, sir, you know that, but it comes rather unexpectedly. May I give you my answer to-morrow?"

Sir John's face beamed. He had expected a point-blank refusal.

"Why, certainly," he agreed. "There is no hurry at all. The appointment can't be made till next year's estimates are through, so take your time."

"Oh, I shan't keep you waiting long," Daunt said. "All the arguments point one way. I only want to run them over in my mind for an hour or two."

He ran them over, in fact, before he went to bed that night, and the more he pondered them the more cogent they seemed. He had dreaded the prospect, now that the expedition was over, of finding himself at a loose end, having to parry Brackenham's astonished queries, cast about for excuses, more or less absurd, for avoiding

Marcia. He could not face that. He would have to leave England again as soon as he had set his affairs in order and stay away—it was the only safe and decent course. Yet unless he could separate himself from Marcia by some irrevocable commitment there would be nothing, after all, but his own will to keep him from her, and, for the first time in his life, he distrusted his will. He wanted to bind himself by some arrangement which would settle the matter independently of his own strength or weakness.

Well; here, surely, was his chance. If he closed with the Governor's offer the die would be cast. He would be a public servant again, bound to his post. It was leisure above everything that he wanted to escape from, and this Lieutenant-Governorship was certain to be a full-time job at any rate. Yes; he would accept it.

"So that's settled," Sir John said next morning. "Capital! Now what are your plans meanwhile. The appointment won't be made for several months yet, as I told you."

"That will suit me quite well," Daunt answered. "Brackenham is sailing at once—he promised his wife—but I shall stay on here myself till I've arranged about getting this ivory down. After that I must go to England for a little. I don't want to, but there are certain questions about my estate there which will have to be settled. However, the lawyers can deal with most of them, and what I must attend to myself won't take long."

That night, for the first time since he had left Marcia in the library at Bracy, he wrote to her of what had happened after the fighting at Mandanjovu, taking pains to set Brackenham's conduct in the most heroic light.

"That ought to help matters," he thought, as he read the letter over. "She won't forget that he saved my life—mine of all men!"

He threw down his pen and filled his pipe.

"Dash it all! I should rather like her to know that I sucked his beastly wound too," he said to himself, laughing, as he sealed the envelope, "but that would spoil everything."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE

THE sconces on the walls of the great room were unlit, so that the whole of its circumference lay in shadow. In the midst of this dark setting the long dinner-table glowed like a bright constellation in a nebulous sky. Here were trails of peach-coloured roses ; mellow silver ; the soft light of old wine shining through old glass like amber set in crystal ; the white necks and shoulders of the women ; the intense aqueous sparkle of their diamonds. Here and there, on a black coat, the star and ribbon of some knightly order ; on all sides a great pleasant humming and rippling of human voices.

Brackenham was agreeably seated between Mrs. Marling, one of the most popular women in London, and the much admired Lady Eustace Gayne.

"Central Africa must be rather a nice place I should think," Mrs. Marling said to him. "At any rate it seems to have agreed with you. I never saw any one looking so aggressively well and cheerful."

Brackenham laughed.

"You're quite right," he said. "Nobody need waste any sympathy on African travellers, Mrs. Marling. You can't imagine what a pleasant life they lead."

"Oh yes, I can," said she. "I've often thought how nice it must be—no trains to catch, no engagements to

keep, any old clothes, and unlimited sunshine. I almost wonder you came back. I wouldn't if I were a man."

"Well, my tastes are catholic," Brackenham said. "I had a capital time out there certainly, but civilization has its charms too, you know."

"Meaning this sort of thing?" she asked, waving a disdainful hand.

"Meaning that I'm enjoying myself very much at this moment," he answered, smiling at her.

Her face dimpled. "Thank you," said she, making him a little mock bow, "but, saving your courtesy, what does it amount to after all, this civilization you talk about? Getting everything done by pressing buttons and pulling wires I suppose, and having to write an immense number of letters and being civil to people who bore you. Can you think of anything else?"

"Why, of course," Lady Eustace cut in from the other side. "You're leaving out all the really nice things, Adela. Like new frocks and lobster mayonnaise, and going racing and dancing, and always having hot water in one's bedroom."

Mrs. Marling shook a finger at her.

"Now you are not to interfere, Lucy," she exclaimed. "You're a frivolous woman, and you don't understand. The whole thing isn't worth the bother of it, let alone six shillings in the pound or whatever it is they take off our incomes now. Not that I care a bit about money itself. It's not being able to live without it that vexes me. If I wasn't pinioned I would fly straight off to the wilderness, where there isn't any or any use for any, and you never have to worry about bank balances and overdrafts and nuisances like that. Your wants are reduced to the only things that really matter, and you can get them without any trouble at all. For instance, when you feel hungry you just give some amiable savage a handful of beads or a pinch of salt and he gives you a

nice basket of fresh eggs or bananas, and then you go straight home and fry them."

"Oh, Adela! That's socialism, isn't it?" Lady Eustace exclaimed. "Besides, you're leaving out all the nasty things now, just as you left out all the nice ones before. Don't forget that you'd have to take quinine every day, and sleep under a mosquito net. Wouldn't she? And perhaps be eaten by a python or a hyæna!"

The dinner went on in a crescendo of chatter and merriment, which subsided at last as the old Duke of Cardiff pushed back his chair to propose the toast of the evening.

Lord Brackenham needed no introduction, he said, for he was every one's friend. Many of those present also knew Captain Tremenere, who had been associated with him in one of the most remarkable adventures in African history. The speaker knew no more of their experiences as yet than had been publicly announced in the Press; but, even from that, it was possible to realize in some degree the extraordinary difficulties which the expedition had encountered, the tenacity with which it had held to its purpose, and the completeness of its success. They were living in prosaic times; in times very far removed, most people would have said, from the spirit of mediæval adventure. Yet in the achievement of these two young Englishmen there was something that recalled, for once, the great days of Drake and Raleigh.

"I am an old man," the Duke concluded, "but I have enough heart and imagination left to appreciate such exploits still, and all of you, who are my guests to-night, will join me heartily, I know, in congratulating Lord Brackenham and his absent friend on the happy fortune which has brought them safe and triumphant out of so many perils."

The toast was drunk with the usual acclamation ; the port went round again, and once more a hush befell. Without possessing any high gift of oratory, Brackenheim was known to be rather an effective after-dinner speaker in his cheerful, rattling way. Every one looked at him, but he did not rise. The silence continued, a few coughs and desultory whispers rather emphasizing than disturbing it. It became embarrassing ; Mrs. Marling touched Brackenheim's sleeve.

" They are waiting for you to reply," she said softly.

He did not answer — only stared at her with bewildered miserable eyes. He seemed to be huddled up in his chair rather strangely. She grew suddenly nervous.

" What is it ? are you ill ? " she asked.

The man on her other side leant forward and looked at Brackenheim intently ; caught Mrs. Marling's eye and shook his head significantly.

" Oh ! you can't mean it ! " she whispered, in horrified accents.

" I'm afraid so," he rejoined, under his breath. " You had better let him alone, I think."

" But, my dear General, they are all waiting for him to speak. There will be a scene in a minute. What on earth are we to do ? "

" I wish I knew," he answered. " It's uncommonly awkward."

" Awkward ! why, it's dreadful ! and I never noticed. He didn't seem to be drinking much. It's the excitement I suppose, after getting back from Africa. Oh ! I wish I could get the women away."

She glanced anxiously about her as she spoke. Marcia was sitting next to the Duke, separated from her husband by the whole length of the table, and by an intervening bank of flowers and silver. Lady Eustace was looking steadily into her plate ; some of the other guests

had begun to force conversation again in a valiant effort to disguise the now general sense of embarrassment.

Other times, other manners. A few generations ago it was part of the routine of every gentleman's life to get helplessly drunk at dinner, but nowadays that is emphatically one of the things that are not done. The men nearest to Brackenham looked at him savagely under their brows. He seemed to make an effort to rouse himself, and opened his mouth, but without being able to articulate; then leaning forward, not without difficulty, he took a menu card from the table and began to write on the back of it, slowly and clumsily, with his left hand.

"Don't let my wife be frightened," the pencilled words ran. *"I can't speak; something has happened to me. My right side—I can't move my right arm."*

Of his two immediate neighbours Mrs. Marling was sitting with her back nearly square to him. On his left, Lady Eustace Gayne's face still showed its clear, sweet profile. He pushed the card towards her awkwardly with his left forefinger. She turned slowly and read what was written, her eyes dilating with a sort of terror.

"Oh, my God!" she cried helplessly.

Every one heard her. There was a general stir.

"Anything the matter?" the old Duke called out. Somebody picked up the note and took it round to where Cardiff was sitting. His sister, who was acting as hostess, had already begun to collect the frightened eyes of the women.

"Your husband has been taken ill, Lady Brackenham," he said quietly. "Don't be alarmed; fortunately, Sir Jacob Brent is here. If you will just stay where you are for a minute. And will every one else except Sir Jacob go away please."

Brent, at that time the most famous physician in London, moved quickly to Brackenham's side. The

Duke and Marcia remained standing at a little distance. In a few moments the great room was empty save for those four. Marcia had turned very white, otherwise she showed no sign of emotion. That Brackenham, who had enjoyed such almost monotonously perfect health from his cradle, who never, that she could remember, had suffered even an hour's toothache or a cold in the head, should now suddenly be ill, so ill as this, with Sir Jacob bending over him, the whole party breaking up in confusion on his account, seemed to her monstrous and scarcely believable. The incongruous accessories of the scene increased her sense of rebellion. The softly lit table, the decanters standing where they had been arrested in mid circuit, the cigarette smoke still drifting, the pyramids of fruit—these things were the visible ensigns of gaiety, of comradeship, of life in its most secure and cheerful aspect. What had they to do with sickness, and isolation, and the shadow of fear? Yet now she felt curiously alone, helpless, mortally afraid. Cardiff spoke to her, but she did not answer. In truth, she was not conscious at that moment of his presence; scarcely conscious of anything save the rigid figure of her husband and Brent's impassive face and deftly moving fingers. She wondered dully why Sir Jacob was peering into the pupils of Brackenham's eyes. Presently he left the patient's side and came up to where Marcia and the Duke were waiting.

"Your husband had better be taken to his own house, Lady Brackenham," he said. "You live near here, I think?"

"Yes; in Hill Street."

"Very well; I will telephone for a nurse. She will be here in ten minutes, if you will be ready by then."

"I will be ready," she said. "Only tell me, please—is my husband dangerously ill?"

"He is seriously ill," the doctor answered cautiously. "I can't say more at present. It is a case for a specialist. I will try and get hold of Dr. Whately and bring him to Hill Street with me. Don't lose heart, Lady Brackenham."

She seized his hand gratefully.

"And now, if you will get your cloak," he continued; "at once, please. Just leave your husband to me; it will be better so."

As she went out of the room Cardiff looked at the doctor questioningly. Brent shook his head.

"I don't like it; I don't like it at all," he said. "And to be frank, I don't quite understand it. I hope I can get Whately. If you don't mind, Duke, I'll go to the telephone now."

By the time that Brackenham had been put to bed in Hill Street he was in deep coma, which continued till Sir Jacob arrived, bringing the specialist with him.

"Will you wait somewhere near by?" he said to Marcia. "In the dressing-room if you like. I will come to you as soon as Dr. Whately and I have consulted."

After what seemed to Marcia an interminable interval—it was in fact scarcely half an hour—he rejoined her.

"I think I ought to tell you at once that the case is extremely serious," he began. "Moreover, it is a peculiar case. There are features about it which puzzle both Dr. Whately and myself. Now you must try and be brave, Lady Brackenham, for perhaps you can help us. There are some questions I want to put to you."

"I will help you in any way I can," she answered eagerly. "I will tell you anything I know."

"Well, you see," the doctor resumed, "we are quite in the dark about Lord Brackenham's medical history, if you understand what that means."

"Yes—I think I understand. You want to know whether he has been ill before?"

"Yes; and what his personal habits are and so on."

"I see; well, I can answer that quite easily," she said. "My husband has a perfectly clean record of health. He has been an exceptionally strong man all his life."

"Never had any seizure like this before?"

"Oh no!"

"Never taken—pardon me for asking—never taken drugs of any kind—injections?"

She stared at him for a moment.

"Drugs! my husband!" she exclaimed. "Why, Sir Jacob, he is the last man in the world——"

"Of course, of course," he rejoined soothingly. "But I had to ask. There are certain symptoms, you see—toxic symptoms."

"Toxic," said she, knitting her brows. "What is that? I seem to know the word, but I can't remember——"

"Poisonous," he said.

She clasped her hands. A fearful thought ran suddenly through her brain.

"Oh! Sir Jacob! I had forgotten," she exclaimed; "I ought to have told you. He was struck by a poisoned arrow in Africa. But that was four months ago—nearly five months now; and it was only a little tiny wound, just a scratch. It healed almost at once. Surely it could not be that—not after so long?"

She gazed earnestly into the doctor's face, but could read nothing there.

"You are sure of the interval?" he inquired. "Not less than four months ago?"

"Quite sure."

"Where was he hit, do you know?"

"In the right arm."

Sir Jacob turned towards the door.

"Excuse me for a minute," he said. "I must speak to Dr. Whately."

He re-entered the bedroom, where his colleague was still standing by the patient's side.

"Listen, Whately," he began; "this is important. Lady Brackenham tells me that her husband was wounded by a poisoned arrow in Africa four or five months ago."

The other turned round quickly.

"Ah! there we have it then!" he exclaimed. "That is very interesting. Between four and five months ago, you say; and no complications in the meantime, eh? And now this aphasia; this induration. I've never come across a case at all like it, have you? Some new poison, no doubt—and, my goodness, it does its work thoroughly. Look at him yourself, poor fellow. In the last few minutes."

Sir Jacob leant over the recumbent figure. "Yes," he said, after a little.

The eyes of the two men met.

"Will you tell her?" Whately asked.

The other nodded and went back to the dressing-room.

"Lady Brackenham," he said, "I'm afraid your husband's case has taken a very bad turn. It was a critical case from the first, but now—I hate to wound you, but it is no use disguising the truth."

She looked at him as people look at a judge who is about to pronounce sentence.

"Lord Brackenham is at the point of death," he said.

Marcia felt a sudden cramping of the heart. The doctor's face appeared very large and distinct. She noticed, in an odd detached way, that one of his cheeks was shaved a little higher than the other; the thin

purple veins in his nose ; a black pearl stud in his shirt front. His voice sounded curiously far away.

"Will you come in ?" he said, opening the door of the bedroom.

She glanced at the tense figure lying there, and started violently.

"Surely he is dead," she whispered.

Brent shook his head.

"Then why don't you do something ?" she cried in sudden passion. "You and Dr. Whately, the greatest physicians in London ! Are you going to stand by like this and let my husband die ? He can't be dying ! Such a strong man ! Ah ! how cruel you are !"

She threw herself on her knees by the bedside and so remained for a little, her shoulders heaving. In a few minutes her unreasoning anger passed.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Jacob," she said rising, "and yours too, Dr. Whately. I didn't mean what I said ; I hardly know what I did say. I only wanted to suggest—can't anything more be done—tried ? It seems so terrible just to wait like this."

Humbly she turned her tear-bright eyes on the two men, as if in their mortal hands they held the keys of life and death, and were themselves the arbiters of those tremendous issues. Whately, who was nearest to her, gazed awkwardly at the carpet. A kind-hearted man, and one of the greatest scientists living, he had no professional urbanity, and was never at his ease with a woman unless he had got her anæsthetized.

Sir Jacob, as usual, came to his colleague's rescue.

"Believe me, Lady Brackenham," he said, "we are more grieved for you than we can say, but to raise false hopes now would be wicked. There is nothing more that we can do ; nothing that any one can do, except perhaps——"

"Yes ?" she interrupted eagerly. "Except ?"

He glanced at Whately, who gave an almost imperceptible nod.

"Well ; we could force a rally," Sir Jacob resumed ; "just for a few minutes, you know."

"So that he would know me ? so that he could speak to me ?"

"Yes."

She reflected for a moment.

"Would it give him any pain to do this ? To force a rally, as you say ?"

"Oh no !"

"Then do it, please ; do it quickly," she entreated.

The doctor opened a small metal case, and taking out a hypodermic syringe dropped a couple of pale yellow discs into it. Approaching the sick man, he inserted the needle beneath his skin and slowly pressed the rammer home.

Soon, as if some magic finger had touched him, Brackenham sighed and opened his eyes. For a few moments he looked about him in a bewildered sort of way ; then slowly put out a hand towards his wife.

"That you, my sweet ?" he said weakly.

"Yes, Brack dearest," she answered, stooping to him. "It is I ; you can see me, can't you, Brack ? I'm here, so close to you."

He smiled.

"Yes ; I see you now ; it's getting brighter, Marcia. I see your face quite clearly now."

She bent nearer and kissed him.

"Why, your cheeks are all wet !" he exclaimed wonderingly. "What have you been crying about ?"

"Oh, Brack ! don't you understand ? You're very ill. Don't you remember—at the dinner to-night——?"

"Why, yes," he said. "I remember now. Yes, you are right ; I am very ill."

"Not in pain, dear, are you ?"

"No, not at all. My head's rather buzzy, you know, and my body feels sort of queer and light, as if it didn't belong to me. You can't think what an odd sensation it is. Not painful a bit. I can't describe it. However, it doesn't matter."

She looked at him piteously.

"Are we alone?" he asked.

She nodded. The doctors and nurse had withdrawn to the far end of the room. There was silence for a while.

"Is there something you want to say to me, Brack?" she inquired at last.

"Yes," he answered. "Something that's been worrying me a great deal lately. About you and Daunt."

She caught her breath.

"You haven't spoken his name since I came back; and he never mentioned you once to me all the time we were in Africa. You used to be such good friends. You haven't quarrelled with him, have you?"

She shook her head.

"I've thought sometimes that you may not quite understand Daunt," he went on. "He has his faults, of course, like the rest of us, and a quick temper is one of them. I've heard him speak rather sharply to you myself sometimes; but you mustn't mind that. You see, I want to feel that you will have somebody to befriend you and help you, and he's such a level-headed chap—known us all our lives too. I've named him as your trustee. So if there is any misunderstanding you must promise me to make it up with him. Don't cry, dear. Why are you trembling so?"

She turned her face away.

"I haven't quarrelled with him," she faltered. "It isn't anything like that."

"What then?"

"Oh! I don't know, Brack. I don't want to think

about him just now. Why do you always take his part? Ever since you were boys it's been the same; you've always put him first, as if he was a better man than you. I can't bear it—when you've given your life for his."

His grasp tightened on her arm.

"What do you mean? My life for his?" he asked quickly.

"He wrote to me," she answered in a low voice, "after you were wounded. He told me what happened when the archer shot at him—how you covered his body with your own. Ah! can't you guess how I feel about that? What did he ever do to deserve it?"

Brackenham looked at her fixedly.

"If Daunt told you so much, didn't he tell you more?" he asked. "Didn't he say what followed? No, I can see he did not. He wouldn't. But it is right that you should hear, Marcia. He knew my wound was poisoned, and, knowing that, he sucked it."

She sat up quickly, her eyes wide and shining. At first she was conscious only of an immense relief. So long as she believed Brackenham's act of devotion to be unrequited it had seemed to place a hopeless barrier between her and the man for whose sake his generous life was given. A minute ago she had said truly that she could not endure to think of Daunt. Now, everything was different. She could think of him freely and proudly as she used to do. But hard on that thought came another and a terrible one. Brackenham saw it in her eyes.

"No, Marcia," he exclaimed earnestly. "Daunt is safe. I am sure of it. I don't know why exactly, but I am sure. It's been so with all the Tremeneres; they're not fated to die that way. You remember the old story—what the last Abbot of Locksbrook said, hundreds of years ago. It's come true of Daunt's family in

every generation, and it's coming true of him now. 'The arrow of the archer shall turn aside from thy breast.' It was preordained, you see."

Little as the legend meant to her, the sick man's earnestness, his air of profound conviction, impressed her not a little.

"You'll admit now that you owe him something, won't you, Marcia?" he went on. "He did his best to save me for you."

"I know, I know," she answered soothingly. "Don't trouble about it any more, dear. You mustn't tire yourself."

"Yes, but promise me," he persisted, "promise to make it up with him. Something has come between you two lately. I don't know what it is, but something. Marcia, I shouldn't like to think of you left all alone. It's a difficult world, and you'll have a lot of money and so on. When I chose Daunt as your trustee I thought it would be such a good arrangement."

She bent her head till he could see only the fore-shortened curve of her cheeks and the wet lashes clinging to them.

"Very well. Be comforted, dear. I promise," she said.

"Honour bright?" he urged.

She smiled faintly at the boyish phrase.

"Honour bright," said she.

CHAPTER XXV

DAUNT MAKES RESTITUTION

DAUNT was on the point of returning to England when the news of Brackenham's death reached him. He read the cablegram with that sort of resentful incredulity which most of us feel when confronted suddenly with tidings at once bitter and unexpected.

"Deeply regret Brackenham died yesterday from effects of wound received in Africa."

So much in a dozen words! So much in two! He repeated them mechanically: "Brackenham died"—Impossible! But it was not impossible. It had happened. The doctors had been wrong then when they had said there was nothing to fear, and Xavier had been right, the cowardly rascal! His triumph was accomplished; his posthumous vengeance had struck out that dear life at last, as he had boasted it would. Poor Brack, of all men, so honest and joyous, who had wrought no evil to any one, whose mind had never harboured a mean purpose or an ungenerous thought. He crushed the telegram between his hands as if it had been the murderer's throat. Ah! If he had only not interfered. If he had left the half-caste to bleed his black life out where he fell, then this would not have happened. And yet, what did that paltry scoundrel matter, after all? It was himself, Daunt Tremenere,

who had brought this thing to pass ; yes, he and no other. He had taken Brackenham with him into an adventure designed solely for his own ends ; an adventure manifestly perilous. If any forfeit were needed, it would have been just that he should have paid it, since the occasion was his own, yet it had not been so. He had come out whole, unharmed, triumphantly successful, but he had come out alone. The doom that lay upon his house had fulfilled itself once more, as in the time of his fathers, that they should flourish by the sacrifice of others ; that their prosperity should be rooted in the graves of the men who trusted and followed them.

Often had Daunt told himself that the ancient legend of Locksbrook was nothing more than a mediæval fable, bred of superstition and coloured by coincidence. Almost he had succeeded in so persuading himself—in believing that he disbelieved. Yet now, feeling for the first time, in his own breast, the bitterness of that vicarious expiation, recurring so pitilessly through the long generations, it seemed to him that he had always known that day must come. Was its measure then insatiable ? Must the transgression of Richard Tremenere, whose bones had been dust for five centuries, be visited on his descendants for all time—and that through victims whose veins held no drop of his guilty blood, whose lives could not be held accountable for his misdeeds, even upon the doctrine of hereditary responsibility, cruel and stupid as that was ? If so, then better, Daunt told himself passionately, that his race should perish from the earth, its name be no more spoken among men.

It was in this way that there arose in his mind, as he travelled homewards, the germ of that strange resolution which, to the incredulous scorn of the wordly, he put into effect so soon afterwards. The first thing to be

done was to confide his intention to the only person beside himself whom it concerned. When he reached England Marcia was at Bracy, and he rode over there from Locksbrook a few days later. The girl—for she was still hardly more—met him in the hall as he entered. He had never seen her in black before. It emphasized her delicately brilliant beauty, yet somehow it made her look curiously helpless too, he thought.

"I am so glad you have come," she said frankly. "I have been alone here, ever so long."

"Poor child. Well, you are not going to be alone any more. I am going to look after you now."

"I suppose you will have to," she answered, smiling a little. "You are my trustee, you see."

"Am I? I had not heard that."

She lowered her eyes.

"Brack wished it," she said. "It is in his will. I thought you would like to know."

He pulled off his riding gloves slowly and took both her hands in his.

"I am glad of that. I am glad it was in his mind, dear. It makes things easier for us."

He went across to one of the bays overlooking the park and sat down. It was June. The soft air was very still. The brodered earth glowed with light and colour.

"Come here, Marcia," he said presently, seeing that she did not move.

She went to his side.

"I mean to return to Africa," he said. "I have accepted an appointment there. In a few months. I want you to come with me."

"To Africa! Oh, Daunt—how like you! I knew how it would be."

"Did you? What did you know?"

She laughed a little.

"Why, I just knew that if we ever married you would decide for both of us like that—go off to the ends of the earth somewhere and make me follow you."

"No," said he. "If you come, you must come of your free will."

"Oh; I must, must I? He talks of my free will, but he talks in imperatives," she said.

He turned from the window and looked at her.

"Would you rather stay at home, then?" he asked. "Tell me, Marcia. It is comfortable at home, and where I am going there is very little comfort—there may be danger, even. That is why I want you to decide for yourself."

She laughed again; caught the lapel of his coat and pressed her cheek against it.

"Stupid!" she exclaimed, her face hidden. "As if that mattered!"

"Not frightened?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Not now. I've always been rather frightened of Africa before, because I was jealous of her, you see. I was afraid she would take you from me. But I don't mind now where we go, so that you don't leave me behind. You won't do that, will you, Daunt? Ever?"

He smiled.

"Ah; but promise me," she persisted.

"Very well; I promise," he answered gravely, humouring her earnest mood.

"Fancy," she mused. "You and I in Africa, Daunt. Oh! I wonder what it will be like! Darkest Africa."

"No," he broke in quickly, earnest in his turn. "Don't believe that. Stanley called it so because he wanted a catching title for his book. He was a journalist and knew the value of headlines—and every one, since then, has gone about repeating the slander. For

it is a slander. Africa is sunbright all through, Marcia. There is nothing dark about her except the skins of the natives."

She clapped her hands.

"How you defend her!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I want to see her for myself—Africa, my rival!"

She paused for a moment.

"And Locksbrook, Daunt—what are you going to do about Locksbrook while we are abroad? You'd hate to let it again; besides, you needn't now. Anstiss could look after it for us, I suppose, and we could live there when you are on leave."

"Ah!" he said, after a little. "I have come to a decision about that—a strange one, perhaps. I don't know how it will strike you. Most people will think me rather mad, I expect."

She looked at him curiously.

"I had better begin at the beginning," he resumed.

"May I smoke here?"

She nodded, and he took out his pipe and filled it slowly.

"You remember how Locksbrook came to my family," he said at last.

This was beginning at the beginning with a vengeance, Marcia thought.

"Do you mean originally? In the time of the Plantagenets?" she inquired, in some perplexity. "I always understood that the king gave it to your ancestors. One of the Edwards, wasn't it?"

"The king had no power to give it," he answered. "Locksbrook was an abbey, Marcia. It was plundered from the Church. There has been a curse upon the place ever since it came into our hands."

She gazed at him in growing wonder.

"What do you mean, Daunt? Why are you talking so? All that happened hundreds of years ago. You

don't seriously believe such things can matter now, do you ? ”

“ I have tried not to believe it, but I must,” he answered slowly.

She saw that something was toward of greater moment than she had imagined—something that moved him powerfully. She considered for a little.

“ Even if it were so,” she said presently, “ if Locksbrook was really plundered from the Church, as you say, it was foretold, wasn't it, that your family should survive and prosper there ? And so it has. I don't call that a curse.”

“ You forget how the prediction was qualified,” he persisted.

“ Qualified ? ”

“ Yes. It was said that those who followed our fortunes should suffer in our stead ; and it has always been so—always. I could give you instances in every generation, but it is enough for you and me to remember what has happened in our own.”

She was silent for a while. She saw that he was thinking of Brackenham.

“ Dearest,” she said, after a little, “ let me be frank with you. I can't pretend to feel as you do about this. I can't think that men should be punished for such things in our time—such ‘ old, unhappy, far-off things,’ Daunt. But even if it were so, you have no cause to reproach yourself. You tried to save him ; you risked your life for him.”

“ Yes,” he answered, “ but as I look at it, that only makes me surer that the result was in some way predestined. It has happened like that every time, you see. My people have never been cowards ; never sheltered themselves behind others—and yet it has always been the others who have suffered for us, Marcia. The Tremeneres come safe out of everything ; but they al-

ways leave some one behind who trusted and followed them—as I have done.”

She listened helplessly, not knowing what to say. He put an arm about her.

“Listen, my darling,” he said gently. “If you and I have a son he must be free from this doom if we can make him so, else, it were better he should not be born.”

She felt the imminence of some grave announcement, but could not conjecture its purport.

“I must make restitution, late as it is,” he went on. “Locksbrook is sacred ground, Marcia. It is a fatal heritage for us. We have never had a clean title to it. I am going to give it up.”

She seized his arm suddenly, her grey eyes widening.

“Give it up! Ah, Daunt, what are you saying? It is your home. I know how you feel about it. It is everything in the world to you.”

“Yes,” he said, “and I am almost glad that is so, because—well, it’s hard to explain, but I feel somehow that in surrendering so much I shall be making the fullest expiation in my power.”

“But, Daunt, to whom would you give it?” she persisted. “Not back to the Church do you mean?”

“As nearly that as may be,” he answered. “I have made inquiries already. It seems that one cannot convey land to a religious foundation directly. There are certain statutes which forbid it—the Acts of Mortmain. But one can get round them; one can sell land for the benefit of the Church. That is what I am going to do.”

She sat silent for a while, casting about hopelessly in her mind.

“Oh, Daunt, what a wild notion! Locksbrook! Are you in earnest? Yes, I know you are, but I don’t understand—I don’t see what you can do. It is centuries since the monks were expelled. How are you

going to trace their modern representatives after all that time? Are you sure even that they have any representatives now?"

"The Order they belonged to survives to this day," he answered.

"A Roman Order," she protested. "Does it lie with you to sacrifice so much upon those altars? You are not a Roman Catholic."

"No," he assented. "But it makes no difference. I am not doing this for the Church's sake."

He paced about the room awhile and sat down beside her again.

"I daresay it signifies nothing to any man living that my ancestor robbed those monks," he said. "And I realize that it would not do, generally, to rake up such ancient rights and wrongs in these days. Our law refuses to entertain such questions after a certain lapse of time, and rightly so. If it did not, there would be endless confusion. But this case is different. I know in my heart that there is something else at work here, Marcia—some power that cares nothing for our human limitations. I have always had that feeling. I have tried to resist it, but since Brack's death it has passed into conviction, and now I don't want to resist it any more because I know it is right. I can't tell you how or why exactly. The things one feels most strongly are often the things it is most difficult to explain."

She ventured a last remonstrance.

"If it is so," she said, "if truly such a power exists, it has taken its toll as far as your generation is concerned—the life it was ordained to take. Its malice is spent then. You have nothing more to fear from it."

"That would be true if I were destined to be the last of us," he rejoined, "but remember what I said a moment ago, Marcia. It is not a question of my single existence

any longer. Since we are free to marry at last I must think of others, dear—the lives that may lie beyond yours and mine.”

She stole a glance at his face, shown darkly in profile against the window of the bay, its characteristic gravity illumined now by that singular look of gentleness which, even in the days of her selfish and uncomprehending maidenhood, had always moved her. Yet in that very look she saw that his resolution was irrevocable ; that it had been fixed before he had come to her at all. A few years since she would have been quick to resent a decision which thus seemed to set her own feelings and opinions aside. But in this hour of reunion, which she had so longed for and despaired of, the feminine instinct of surrender stirred in her breast with irresistible force. She must be wholly at one with her lover now—that was the thought most insistent in her mind. Nothing else mattered. His purpose regarding his estate seemed to her desperate indeed, yet, since she could not detach him from it, she found herself presently, somewhat to her own wonderment, trying to justify it, explain it, reconcile herself to its consequences, so that it might stand between them no more. After all, was not the place Daunt's own, if any one's, to do with as he chose ? And if he saw fit to part with it, what then ? Perhaps he was right. In some people, not greatly differing otherwise from their fellows, there were faculties, she had heard, transcending the mortal norm ; powers of prevision, derived from some source beyond human comprehension, which, in great crises, guided them independently of conscious reason ; often, indeed, against its dictates. What if it were so with Daunt ? What if the life of his race, in which her own life was now to be merged, lay really under the doom and shadow of that ancient wrong ? What if the way he sought was indeed the way of redemption ?

Thus preoccupied, she remained silent so long that he turned at last and touched her lightly.

"Don't worry," he said.

"I am not worrying," she answered. "Only trying to think this out. It is a big thing, you see, and it has taken me by surprise."

"I know," he rejoined. "I wish I could have spared you, Marcia ; especially at a time like this."

"Ah, well ! It is infinitely harder for you than me, Daunt. I see that, of course. I haven't your feeling for Locksbrook—how could I ? It isn't part of my life. I admit I shall hate letting it go, because—well, just because it is a beautiful home, I suppose. Any woman would. But I don't care in the way that you care."

She stopped for a moment and put her hand on his.

"You must do as you think right," she said.

"Yes ; but I want you to think it right too."

"Ah ! you mustn't be too exacting with me, Daunt," she exclaimed, smiling at him. "Don't press me any farther now. Don't reason with me. There isn't any need. As far as my consent can make this easier for you, you have it. And I give it freely, dear ; I give it happily. There is no reservation in my mind."

A quick sense of relief and gratitude filled him. About anything else he would not have urged her at such a time ; would almost indeed have welcomed opposition, so that he might indulge her. Only on this point, he had told himself, he could not yield or compromise, for it involved an issue extending, it might be, far beyond his life and hers, and, as such, did not belong, in his view, to the category of things which could be discussed from the standpoint of private inclination. Yet he had come to Bracy full of misgiving, uneasily conscious that Marcia might insist on so discussing it ; comprehending that, at such a moment, if ever, she might fairly look to find her lover in a mood of becoming submission,

forward to meet her wishes in all respects, or, at the very least, to consult them. Yet here was a transaction of profoundest moment, disposing irrevocably of interests which must closely touch her as his future wife, disposing of them too on grounds which, measured by any ordinary standard, must appear almost fantastic. And this strange proposal he had never submitted to her judgment for an instant—had not, in truth, presented to her as a proposal at all, but rather as a decision already taken, in which he would be glad of her concurrence certainly, but from which he was not prepared to depart, however she might regard it. That was an attitude which might have moved the meekest of women to some show of resentment, and meekness, as he knew, was not characteristic of Marcia.

"I can't thank you enough," he said lamely.

"But you'll get it over as soon as possible, won't you, Daunt? I don't think either of us will be easy in our minds now until it is done. It is like that with all painful things."

He nodded, and they stood for a while, side by side, talking of indifferent matters, watching the elm shadows lengthen across the park.

"I suppose I ought to go now," he suggested at last.

"I suppose so," she assented. "You'll come again, won't you, Daunt, as often as—well, as often as the conventions permit?"

He picked up his gloves and whip, laughing as he kissed her.

"How often is that?" he asked. "I don't know much about the conventions I'm afraid—and, anyhow, they won't stand between us much longer."

"Oh, well," said she with sudden shyness.

A moment later she heard him ride away; saw him turn in his saddle and wave his hand before the rhodo-

dendrons hid him from view. For a minute or two she continued to look thoughtfully in the direction he had taken.

"Men never change," she said to herself. "Not fundamentally like women do. He is just the same Daunt—but fortunately I am not the same Marcia at all."

The bridle path from Bracy to Locksbrook goes by way of Withyford and Brantwick over Keyworth Down. At the western edge of the down it turns about through the larch coppice by Aymer's Cross, and so, dipping sharply towards Wanwood, runs for a little distance along the limestone scarp, in full view of Locksbrook Abbey, set fairly among the blackthorns and pear orchards of the valley below. It is this aspect of Locksbrook which has been made so familiar to the public by means of picture postcards and the illustrated papers. There is, in fact, no other point outside its own gates from which the house can be seen, and nobody passes that way without halting to view it, for, of all its fronts, this is admittedly the most beautiful and impressive.

As Daunt walked down the broken incline from Keyworth, with his horse's bridle over his arm, a man, who had been sitting by the wayside, rose and approached him—a middle-aged man, with a bright, shaven face, having somewhat the look of a schoolmaster or clergyman on holiday, rather stooping of gait, but spare and active, habited in dark tweeds, and equipped with the staff and knapsack of the pedestrian tourist.

"Pardon me, sir," he said politely, "I was wondering whether you could tell me the name of the remarkably fine house in the valley over there."

"Certainly," Daunt answered. "It is Locksbrook Abbey."

"Ah! Locksbrook; I might have guessed it," the stranger said. "I knew the abbey was in this direction, of course, but I had imagined somehow that it was farther on. I was observing the place just as you came up. These are powerful glasses of mine"—he tapped a pair slung about his shoulders—"and so I have been able to make out the architectural details fairly well even from here. It is really a very beautiful house. Strikingly so. You agree with me in that, I am sure."

"I do indeed," Daunt answered, smiling a little at the other's earnest air.

"And of great age evidently. Perpendicular Gothic. Thirteenth century perhaps."

"Yes, the wing you are looking at. But the oldest part is twelfth."

"Ah, twelfth! Really! Six hundred years, eh? And still intact, still inhabited, still a home. That appeals to the imagination, doesn't it? But so few people have any imagination. They see a place like that, and they stare at it, and go on their way. If they think about it at all it is to envy the owner probably. And yet—is the owner to be envied? I don't know. Such a possession is a treasure beyond price no doubt, but it carries grave responsibilities with it. '*Quae non fecimus ipsi*'—you remember?"

"'*Vix ea nostra voco*,'" Daunt responded, in spite of a feeling that it was rather absurd in him to be capping classical quotations like this with a chance-comer on the public way.

"Quite so," the stranger continued, "'*Vix ea nostra voco*.' One scarcely calls such things one's own. A fine ideal, sir. There you have the germinal notion of a trust; but a moral trust only, and so, in these self-seeking times, too often betrayed." He broke off for a moment and shook his head. "I have passed many great manors in the last few days," he went on, "not as

fine as this old abbey certainly, but of much the same character—places with historic traditions—and, in nine cases out of ten, the hereditary lords, the moral trustees, are not there. They have turned their lands and their mansions into stocks and shares; sold what they had no right to sell, just for the difference of a few paltry pounds per cent.—the soil that bred them—to the huckster and the profiteer.”

Daunt looked at the traveller with more interest than he had felt hitherto.

“Yet a man may be the victim of circumstances,” he said.

“You mean, I suppose, that he may be the victim of taxation and high prices,” the other rejoined. “Well, sir, I have not much patience with that plea. It has been pushed too far. It is in the mouth of every man who wants an excuse for shirking his duty. Of course, with the cost of living at its present level, something must be surrendered. That is self-evident. But let a man jettison his luxuries before his responsibilities. I can understand that a landowner should be taxed for a decade or two out of his footmen and his clubs and his hunters and his pheasants; but not, while he can help it, out of his father’s home and his children’s birth-right.”

“I agree,” said Daunt. “But I was not thinking of anything like that. I was thinking—well, it doesn’t matter—but there are cases of quite a different kind.”

“Before we part,” the stranger said presently, “perhaps you can tell me to whom Locksbrook belongs.”

“It belongs to Captain Tremenere.”

“Tremenere? Ah! I seem to have heard that name quite lately. Wait a minute. Why yes, of course! It was in connection with that remarkable expedition somewhere in Central Africa. The papers were full of it a short time ago, you remember. Can it be the same

Captain Tremenere who was the hero of that adventure ? ”

“ It was the same man,” Daunt replied coldly ; “ but he is very far from being a hero.”

“ Why do you say that ? He was, at any rate, the leader of a most hazardous enterprise in one of the wildest countries in the world. To bring a task like that to a successful issue demands great qualities—qualities which we ought to recognize, I think, as having something heroic in them.”

“ Oh, nonsense ! ” Daunt exclaimed irritably. “ I beg your pardon, but you mustn’t believe everything you see in the newspapers. The published accounts may be tolerably accurate as to facts—I don’t say they are not—but these things are just so much copy to pressmen. They work them up, you know. If there was a hero in that affair at all it was not Tremenere, but the man who saved his life at the cost of his own—Lord Brackenham—his best friend.”

His face had flushed. The tourist looked at him curiously. “ Jealous,” he thought.

“ You speak confidently, sir,” he said after a little. “ Do you know Captain Tremenere personally then ? ”

“ I know him very well,” Daunt answered, laughing.

“ Then allow me to say,” the other exclaimed, with sudden heat, “ that I should have expected you to show a more generous appreciation of what he has accomplished. A notable feat of courage and endurance, sir ! I should count it an honour to meet the man whose acquaintance you seem to rate so lightly.”

“ Oh, well—he tried to do his duty according to his lights,” Daunt rejoined in some confusion, preparing to mount his horse again. “ But I can’t stand hearing him described as a hero, you know, because that is ridiculous. As a matter of fact, nobody knows him better than I do, or is more anxious to think well of him. He has his

good points I daresay—every man has—but I get rather tired of him sometimes.”

He drew the reins through his fingers as he spoke and, lifting his whip in salutation, rode away.

The tourist gazed after him thoughtfully.

“A cultivated man. Something attractive about him. I spoke rather sharply perhaps. Still—he ought not to have criticized his friend like that to a mere passer-by. I should hardly have expected it. A gentleman—curious!”

Continuing to look in the same direction, he saw a farm labourer coming up the slope salute the horseman respectfully.

“Excuse me,” he said, as the man approached. “Can you tell me the name of the rider who passed you just now?”

The rustic stared. “Him on the bay mare? Why, ’twere the squire surely,” he answered.

“The squire?”

“Ah! Cap’n Tremenere, over to Locksbrook. Why, I see you talking to him not a minute ago.”

The tourist’s mouth fell slowly open and so remained for a moment.

“Captain Tremenere did you say?” he remarked at last. “I see. I didn’t know—I am a stranger here. Still, that is no excuse for being a fool, is it? Well, I must be getting on,” he added, glancing at the inclination of the sun and adjusting the buckle of his knapsack. “But there is one more question I should like to ask you. Just how long has Locksbrook been the property of Captain Tremenere’s family?”

The countryman raised his brows as one who has to deal with a simpleton indeed.

“Why, I can’t tell ’ee that, mister. Stands to reason. There’s nobody could without ’twere the squire hisself. You see, ’tis a family of very old ancient pedigree.

There's always been Tremeneres up to the abbey far's I know."

"I see," said the traveller again. "From the time when the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, eh? Well, good night, my friend, and thank you."

He picked up his ash staff, stood for a moment musing, and passed on.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TREATY OF THE SANDS

CAPTAIN LEE-BRAZIER had been acting as commandant at Fort Felix now some fifteen months, and, in that short interval, had come near to undoing the best part of what Daunt Tremenere had accomplished there in three years. One can hardly say that he had been badly chosen for his duties, since, in effect, there had been no room for choice—in other words, nobody better qualified for the post had chanced to be available at the time when it had to be filled; a reason which will be found to lie at the bottom of many queer appointments.

Not that Lee-Brazier was a waster, mind you, or anywhere near it. On the contrary, he was a highly efficient regimental officer, with a praiseworthy record in divers parts of the world; a good fellow in most ways, and as full of pluck as a buffalo. In any other situation within the scope of his opportunities he would have filled the bill well enough probably, but for his present employment he had one prime disability—he did not understand the Angoni, and was, in fact, temperamentally incapable of understanding them. A man of small vision was Lee-Brazier. For him the whole human family fell into three simple divisions as White Men, Dagoes, and Nigwigs. All African natives were Nigwigs, of course—couldn't be anything else—and all Nigwigs, in his view, were

fundamentally the same kind of people, to be dealt with in precisely the same way, according to certain assorted principles which he had found to answer perfectly well up to now. That they failed to answer with the Angoni puzzled him at first and ended by exasperating him, which did not mend matters naturally. The angrier he grew, the more the tribe stiffened its back. It gave him to understand that it disapproved of him and all his works, comparing him with his predecessor in terms the reverse of complimentary, and taking upon itself in particular to remind him that the Angoni were not as other natives, least of all as the unclean and servile fish eaters of the coast, but hillmen, Zulus of the Zulus, a king's people, neither to hold nor to bind.

"Swank!" said Lee-Brazier to himself. "Bluff!"

But in the coastal villages, always nosing for the scent of trouble, it began to be rumoured that spears were being sharpened up in the hills, and, in fact, with the Angoni in their present temper, there was manifest ground to fear that the raiding of the low country might begin again. Now Lee-Brazier had been very distinctly instructed that that must not happen, so he was moved presently to address a warning on the point, coupled with a demand for assurances, first to Chenjovu, who excused himself on the plea that he was fully occupied in dying just then, and afterwards to his successor, who evaded the question in an answer "deliberately insolent"—or so Lee-Brazier reported.

The Governor tore his hair when he read this, for he knew that when an officer begins to complain officially about "insolence" on the part of natives, it means, in nine cases out of ten, that he is losing his head and his temper.

"I don't think they really mean mischief yet," he said to Daunt, on the latter's arrival at Zanda. "But they are evidently in a mood which might turn to mis-

chief, and I shan't know a minute's peace now as long as Brazier is there. So you had better get up to your post at once. If you would rather leave your wife here till things are more settled, I can arrange that of course. It might be prudent."

Daunt reflected for a moment.

"No, sir," he answered presently. "I shall take her with me, and I couldn't give you a stronger proof of confidence in the Angoni than that. Whatever happens, they will never harm me or her. As to the rest of it, I can't tell till I get there. I'll push off to-morrow, and report as soon as I can."

To Marcia, of course, he said nothing of this conversation, but, in his own mind, he was not a little disturbed by it. It seemed to him that his whole purpose in returning to Africa was at stake. If the Angoni broke bounds now, after three years, they would break badly—as to that he had no illusions—and then all his work would have to be done over again; if, indeed, it could be done again at all.

The throng of natives assembled on the beach at Fort Felix to greet the new Lieutenant-Governor and his bride was the largest, probably, that had ever come together in those parts for a peaceful purpose. Not only the local Atonga were there, but representatives of every coastal tribe from the Ankonde of the northern littoral to the Ajawa of Marimba. A moment since all these people had been chattering comfortably among themselves in loosely disposed groups. Now suddenly, as though moved by some herd instinct of self-preservation, they had risen and drawn close to each other, mouths agape, speechless, their round heads and strangely distended eyes all turned to the same point, as if mechanically pivoted.

What had so attracted and silenced them was but a

small party of men who could be seen descending rapidly from the foothills. Although these were still some distance away, the conspicuous battle-dress of the Angoni Zulus, which they wore, could not be mistaken. They looked to be not more than twenty or thirty strong, yet as they passed swiftly from rock to rock, with the effortless stride of mountaineers, the flashing iron of their spear-heads, their feathery crests shaken by the wind, made an appearance so martial that the consternation of the peaceful spectators seemed not wholly without reason.

It is not to be supposed that they were cowards, these coast folk. In the face of ordinary menaces they could acquit themselves hardily enough, but the legends of their ancestors, reinforced by all the experience of their own lives, had taught them to look upon the plumed and shielded figures now approaching as irresistible messengers of rapine and terror and sudden death.

"Nkondo! War!" they cried, gesticulating and recoiling on one another. "They are Angoni!"

Once uttered, the dreaded name was taken up and called on all sides, till its multitudinous echoes filled the air with clamour.

"*Angoni! Angoni! Ifika nkondo!*"

Tremenere's laughter steadied them at last.

"They are Angoni, yes; but it is not war. I answer for it; let no man move. See, they are but a score all told."

Marcia caught his arm.

"Oh, Daunt! how splendid they look! Not a bit like ordinary natives."

"They are not ordinary natives; they are Zulus—from the hills up there. I've told you about them before, surely?—the Angoni."

"Yes, of course; but I hadn't realized they were so picturesque. What enormous great shields. Oh! I

hope they'll come up close, will they, and let us see them properly? I wish I had my camera."

Tremenere did not answer. He was looking at their leader, a tall man, much older than any of his followers.

"It is Zwidi," he said presently; "the brother of the old chief. Look at the lion skin on his shoulders; that is a mark of royalty among these people. He is chief himself now, you see—their line of succession goes like that; from brother to brother."

The deputation, for it seemed to be no more, advanced in column to within fifty paces, changed into line, and gave the royal salute. The tall old man came forward alone.

"Thou reignest?" Tremenere asked.

"In the stead of him who was my brother."

"Ah! it befell then as he foretold—before the green cob was swollen in the husk?"

The Zulu placed his hand at the level of his breast.

"The corn stood thus when my brother died," he said.

"In peace?" asked the soldier.

"In silence," Zwidi answered proudly. "Yet, before his time was come at last, he charged me plainly concerning thee, lest yet thou shouldst return to us again. Therefore am I here to do thy bidding, Master of All. This first for my brother's sake; thereafter in my own name and in the name of my people."

"What does he say?" Marcia inquired curiously.

Daunt translated, and as he did so the Zulu, turning, gazed fixedly at the girl for the first time. Void of offence as his glance was, its gravity and intensity seemed to disconcert her a little, and she moved closer to her husband's side.

"You seem to be an object of general attention just at present," he remarked, for every one was now looking at her.

"Have they never seen a white woman before?" she asked.

"Not a woman like you," he answered smiling.

In truth, their experience in that direction had been limited previously to a few missionaries' wives; homely, earnest creatures, with hollow faces and rugged complexions, not differing very greatly in aspect from their own menfolk, save in the matter of beards and of visible legs; certainly not seeming to have anything beyond their sex in common with this radiant newcomer, whose look and bearing, strangely contrasted with the dark countenances about her, seemed almost like those of some angelic visitor, condescended earthward from a happier star.

"Come! I had better introduce you formally, I think," Tremenere said, laughing. He took her hand in his and, moving forward a little, began to speak in a loud voice, using the Zulu and Chitonga tongues alternately, so that all might understand him.

"I am Teremani," he said, "the same whom ye have known, yet not the same, for I who was alone am alone no more. Look well upon her who stands beside me, my comrade and my dearer part, in whose defence my strength, henceforward, shall be as the strength of an impi. As your hearts are white for me let them be white for her, and if honour be my due see that ye render it to this, my wife, also."

The slight inflection of peremptoriness in his voice did not escape his hearers, who began to eye Marcia, under their brows, with a kind of awe. Curiously enough, although the rank and file of the sex are rated as lowly in Africa as anywhere in the world, individual women have often exercised unbounded influence there, from the times of Sheba and Cleopatra to this day, so that the idea of elevating a woman to exceptional dignity and privilege, even to sovereignty itself, is in no way strange to the native mind.

Zwidi lowered his gaze for an instant before he answered.

"She whom thou hast chosen is meet to go by thy side, and be the mother of thy sons," he said; "for she is fairer than new ivory, more welcome than the early rain, the sweetener of the earth. Whoso offends against her is my enemy; him shall my vengeance pursue. Until the rocks of Kwendeni turn to dust and the waters of Nyasa to bitterness."

Marcia pulled her husband's sleeve.

"He says you sweeten the earth like fresh rain," he explained hurriedly. "Figure of speech, you know; don't get conceited!"

"Ah; how nice of him!" she exclaimed, laughing and blushing a little. "I wish you would learn to say things like that, Daunt. One must come to Africa for compliments in the grand manner, it seems. And they call these people savages!"

Tremenere looked thoughtful. Compliments in the grand manner were well enough, but these expressed no more than a personal goodwill which had never been in doubt. Zwidi was an old friend and had spoken as such, but he was also a new chief, and issues of great moment hung upon his intentions in that capacity. The truce with the coastal tribes, which had given peace to the littoral of Nyasa for more than three years past, had rested solely on Chenjovu's pledge, had been maintained by his influence alone; and now Chenjovu was dead. Nothing in tribal custom bound his successor to endorse such a policy. It had never really been a popular policy with the Angoni, still less with Zwidi himself, who was a thorough reactionary and fire-eater at heart, an old man indeed, but not too old to lead a foray still. And then the trail of Lee-Brazier and his methods lay thick upon the situation. Undoubtedly the thought of braving him, the desire to assert their independence

of his pretensions ran strongly in the minds of the hill-men—not less strongly perhaps than their love of raiding for its own sake. True, it was not Lee-Brazier but Daunt Tremenere with whom they had to deal now; but Daunt had been away a long time, as natives reckon time. The tribe had hardly looked to see him again, and indeed, it was only an accident that had brought him back at all. No doubt his personal popularity survived, but how far could he count on it at a juncture like this? A man may live in kindly memory long after he has ceased to be an effective force in affairs, and that might well be his own case. Yet he must put it to the test. He must know plainly whether the coastal truce was to hold or break, and he must know it here and now, for on that issue everything depended.

As he began to speak, something in his voice and manner seemed to apprise his hearers that he was going to deal with a question of paramount gravity, and the eyes of the whole assembly turned instantly upon his face. The coastal natives, as soon as they understood that he was pleading their cause, developed a strange excitement, rocking their bodies to and fro and clapping their hands loudly. The Angoni, on the contrary, stood motionless and silent. Daunt watched them intently, but their look was inscrutable. Only once Zwidi interrupted him.

"Our quarrel is not with thee, Teremani," the old man cried passionately, "but with him who came in thy stead and with the Government that sent him."

"Nay! that cannot be," Tremenere answered quickly. "Did not Chenjovu the Elephant swear to me saying, 'I will pledge thee the hearts of my people in the day when I am no more?' Yet whoso breaks the peace of my Government, whose servant I am, breaks peace with me also. His heart is not with me, but against me. And I say to you, if the hearts of the Angoni are

against me it were better that I had not returned to this land again. I have spoken. Make answer then, Zwidi, that I may know if I stand where once I stood. Make answer and say that the oath of thy brother, which he spake with his living voice, shall have redemption now in thy mouth, and his spirit honour among his people yet, though the grave cover him."

In his own tongue Daunt Tremenere was no orator, but there was that in his nature which made it somehow easier for him to speak effectively to wild folk than to men of his own world. The Angoni, who had heard him so passively at first, were now trembling with emotion.

"Listen, Master of All," Zwidi said at last. "The pledge that my brother gave he gave to thee, and not to another, neither to thy Government nor to the stranger who should come in thy stead. Tell me this then, and, as thou answerest, so will I answer thee. Art thou here to speak for another, and, having spoken, to depart again? Or wilt thou abide among us verily, as it was in the old time?"

"I speak for myself," Tremenere answered at once. "I am here to abide in the land, as it was in the old time."

"It is well," the chief answered. He let his head droop as he said it, while such stillness held the assembly that the faint sound of the wind in the grass, a moment since scarcely noticeable, became all at once a dominant sound. So long the old man thus remained that Marcia had begun to wonder whether the interview was over when, at last, he drew himself erect again.

"Atonga, Ahenga, Ankonde, or of what tribes soever ye be," he cried, in loud imperious tones, "behold and hear me, for I am Zwidi, King of the Angoni. My people are a warrior people, but ye are tillers of the earth and netters of the deep. Our blood is the free blood of

the Amazulu known of old, and ye are bastards and the children of slaves. We are of the hills; our home is near to the sun"—he pointed to where the topmost shafts of the Angoni highlands broke clear above the clouds—"and ye are coast dwellers, unstable as the sand. I had said, in my pride, the eagle shall roost with the cormorant, ere there be peace between us and the Fish Eaters. Yet such is the will of Teremani, who so moved the heart of my brother Chenjovu that the feet of his impis were stayed upon the mountains of Hora. Be not afraid then, ye who are my cattle. I am Zwidi, lord of ten thousand spears. But Teremani is Teremani, Master of All. His will is my will, and from the oath of my brother I will not depart."

He turned from the villagers and addressed himself directly to Tremenere.

"I have answered," he said proudly, "and now, in token of faith, receive this iron."

As he spoke he drew his broad, man-stabbing assegai from the loop of his shield, and snapping the steel head from the shaft, laid the pieces at Daunt's feet. Whereafter his followers, advancing in their turn, so broke their weapons also.

Then Zwidi stretched forth his empty hands and said: "Master of All, as thou didst stand within the kraal of Chenjovu the Elephant, in the day when thou wast a stranger among us, defenceless yet not afraid, so behold us now unarmed before thee, and our spears broken in the sight of the Fish Eaters. By which signs be it known that the spirit of my brother moveth yet though the grave cover him, nor shall his promise fail, since my mouth hath redeemed it."

He ceased, and deep silence fell again. There was in it a rare quality of solemnity, such, almost, as is felt in the stillness of a church when the benediction has been spoken. Even Marcia, who had not understood a

word of the Zulu's discourse, knew, instinctively, that something grave and final had been decided by it. She kept her eyes on the ground, for a long time as it seemed to her, and, raising them at last, saw that the multitude had quietly withdrawn—the Angoni towards their hills, the fisherfolk to their huts. Only her husband stood beside her, looking at the broken spears on the sand.

"What is it, Daunt? What did he say?"

He explained.

"Ah!" said she, after a little. "It is a great thing that he has promised, surely?"

"It is everything," he answered. "I was not easy in my mind about it."

"And now you are satisfied? Sure that he will keep faith with you?"

"Quite sure."

"Somehow I feel that too," she said. "Only, I wonder——"

"Well?"

"I don't know. It seems strange to me, Daunt. Such a big question to be settled so simply—a question of life and death. Just between you two men, here in the open, with the birds calling, and the wind in the grass. At home, a thing like that would mean no end of fuss, wouldn't it? A posse of old gentlemen would sit round a table for weeks, and there would be law officers at their elbows advising them, and secretaries and people taking everything down, and the newspapers writing it up, and stars and ribbons for everybody—you know what I mean."

He laughed.

"Yes, there would be all that, no doubt—and the usual scrap of paper to show for it in the end. We do things differently here. But I'd rather have that old Zulu's naked word than the seals of half the chancelleries in Europe."

He looked lakeward as he spoke. A cloud stirred upon the waters, drifting towards them ; so translucent, so penetrated by the sun, that it seemed brighter than the shining surface over which it moved.

" Why, it's rain ! " he exclaimed in surprise. " I've never known it come so early."

" A fair omen ! " Marcia cried.

The air grew suddenly fresh.

" Come, you had better take cover," Daunt suggested.

" Ah ! Let us wait a few minutes. It's only a mist. How sweet the earth smells ! "

She lifted her face and hands in delight as the first drops fell.

Half-way up the foot-hills Zwidi turned and looked down upon the lake now far beneath him. He saw the cloud moving across it ; saw the solitary couple on the sands move closer to each other ; saw the man put his arm about his companion, protectively, as the light rain broke about them.

Screened thus, in aqueous radiance, their embracing figures showed for a moment, like phantom shadows, strangely softened and transformed. Then the shining veil thickened about them, and hid them from the watcher's sight.

THE END

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